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TESIS DOCTORAL

From Waste to Worth. Recycling Moving Images as a Means for Historical Inquiry

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INTRODUCTION

Moving images can be many things, and serve many purposes. This thesis has set out as its aim to elaborate on one of their possible uses: as a tool for critical thought, particularly on historical events and their recorded traces. There are many ways in which moving images can lend themselves to this purpose, I have set out to study films that do it in a certain manner. The coordinates I have followed to select the films I use as case studies have been the following: first, the films seen at length in the following chapters are made of recycled footage. Most of this footage is "factual," that is, the origin of the footage is either from newsreel or news reportage, amateur footage, domestic films and educational or instructive films. It was not produced for entertainment or artistic ends. The origin of the footage is varied, but the vast majority does not come from large budget film productions or feature films destined to movie theatres, in fact, much of it is can be considered part of marginal and ephemeral productions or amateur recordings. In second place, the original footage of the films covers a specific historical event or period, which is easily recognizable to most viewers. In third place, once recycled, this footage is rearticulated in an essayistic manner or in a way that has essayistic qualities, by which I mean it is articulated into an elaborate discourse of thought on a historical topic. And, lastly, the dates of production of both the original footage and the film in which it is re-edited are prior to the expansion of Internet and digital technology.

Each film carries the inscription of its own time and of a time before; a historical contrast is present in the films. Also, each film in one way or another addresses its own technology of representation, which encompasses the technologies that preceded it and hints towards new developments. The directors of the films seen at length in the following chapters make a great effort to take images into their own hands and convert them into building blocks for their own statements or inquiries, hinting towards something that will become effortless within just a few years with the development of digital technology. Currently photographs, film, sound, and text have gone digital, all these cultural products have migrated to systems and media dependent on electronic computation, which converts all input into binary structures of 0s and 1s, and it is on

this binary level that they can be stored, transferred and manipulated. This migration has an effect on our visual and intellectual cultures, "no matter how much digital systems resemble film or television, they are fundamentally different. The computer, when linked to a network, is unique in the history of technological media: it is the first widely disseminated system that offers the user the opportunity to create, distribute, receive, and consume audiovisual content with the same box."[1] However, the computer and digital technologies were not born out of a vacuum. Kittler, following McLuhan, argues "one medium's content is always other media: film and radio constitute the content of television; records and tapes the content of radio; silent films and audiotape that of cinema; text, telephone, and telegram that of the semi-media monopoly of the postal system."[2] It is my contention that film, video, VCRS, video cameras, sound recording devices, walkmans, CDs, phones, and text are the content of Internet and digital systems of record and transmission and they have participated the shaping of such developments.

I have chosen a specific time frame that corresponds with the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, because of the historical and technological particularities of said decades, as well as the relationship between them. The films I am interested in are films that look back and offer a view on events that are spread out in the 20th century, even if the films themselves were produced in the last two decades of the 20th century. In addition, I have also included a film from 1927, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, which offers an interesting contrast to the two case studies of the thesis, while sharing enough similarities to make the comparison relevant.

Images have always been tools for legitimization and of resistance, but during most of the 20th century the moving image, the unanswerable, the uni-directional moving image carried the largest weight. This thesis is centred on the two last decades of the 20th century, during which cinema for the most part still consists of celluloid prints, television depends on tubes for broadcast and the home movie industry is made of video tapes of magnetic signals (and at the end of which DVD enters the market). The thesis covers (and thinks) three moments in history and three moments in the history of technology, of visibilization of politics, of modes of war (cold and hot) and

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[1] Lunenfeld, Peter. 2000 "Introduction. Screen Grabs: The Digital DIalect and New Media Theory," In Peter Lunenfeld (ed), *The Digital Dialect. New Essays on New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusettes and London, England, 2000, pp. xiv-xxi, cit. p. xix.

[2] Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 2.

revolution. Due to restrictions of time and space I have limited myself to the analysis of two films from the 1980s and 1990s, *The Atomic Cafe* (1982, The Archives Project) and *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992, Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica) as case studies, and another film from the first half of the century, *the Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927, Esfir Shub) for introductory purposes. This choice is a personal one, but it also responds to the fact that all of these films address the technologies that shape their times and their specific historical moment the "golden age" of the Cold War, and the Fall of the Iron Curtain. Shub's film, which is offers her view of the Bolshevik Revolution, offers a very interesting counterpoint.

In order to better understand the context of the films that shall be seen as case studies, it might be helpful to demarcate a few historical-political as well as technological developments that take place in these years. These are just some introductory brushstrokes as to not leave aside the bigger picture of what is happening while the filmmakers are at work.

Historical-Political Context

The mechanical production of moving images, which is an invention of the 19th century, has come to represent in many ways the 20th century. Cinema, in particular, has become a repository of sorts for the recorded traces of events of the century that saw it develop, a century which can be thought many different ways. Alain Badiou argues that we could term it the Soviet century, the century of totalitarianism, or the century of the triumph of capitalism and the world market. But, in fact, the century has been made of the crossings of all of the above; it has been the totalitarian, the Soviet and the liberal century.[3] To better understand this time he asks the question what was thought during this century that was not the new elaboration of an old thought? He questions the "subjectivities of the century", that is, instead of judging the century as an objective fact, he asks how it has been subjectivised.[4] This begs the initial question, when does the 20th century start, beyond the mere numerical figure of 1900? One common argument is that the divisory line between the 19th and the 20th centuries was 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War. Badiou sees in the years between 1890 and 1914 a prologue which had been a period of extraordinary inventiveness, in science, in music, in art, in literature, in politics and in a the medium of cinema. Cinema itself had been

[3] Badiou, Alain. *El Siglo*. Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2005, pp. 11-22.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 17.

invented in those years. According to Badiou, one of the features that makes the Great War different to other wars was that the year 1914 sees the start of a long tragedy tainted with "the use of human material without scruples."[5] I would like to argue that this use is not just limited to the way conflict was managed, but also the way mechanically produced images would further this use of human material without scruples. And it seems like ever since war has developed with the same lack of scruples towards human material. It is the experience of the First World War that leads Walter Benjamin to write of the destruction of experience, an argument that shall be seen in detail in the discussions in the chapters of the thesis.[6]

According to Badiou, one of the main characteristics that sets the 20th century apart from the century it follows is that it was not the century of "ideologies" in the sense of the imaginary and the utopian, its main determination was the "passion for the real."[7] It is my contention that this "passion for the real" is intimately intertwined with a redefinition of the real, influenced by the development of cinema and notions of photographic ontology, and what Mary Anne Doan calls an anxiety of "total representation" that came with the invention of cinema at the turn of the century.[8] It is the century of the act, of the effective, of the absolute present, and not the century of the announcement and the hereafter; it is not, in Badiou's terms, the unfortunate romanticism of the 19th century.[9] It is the century of war, which brings together several ideas. It is the century of "the Two", of antagonism not dialectic. There is a central antagonism, which means there are two subjectivities organized on a planetary level immersed in a mortal combat. The century has seen an antagonism between two ways of thinking antagonism, which was the essence of the confrontation between communism and fascism, based on a confrontation between classes in the former and between races in the latter. And later another division followed, during the Second World War, by two ways of understanding antifascism, which would later develop into the confrontation articulated in the bipolar relations of the Cold War. [10]

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[5] *Ibid*., p. 19
[6] Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 83-109. New York: Schocken Books, 1988.
[7] Badiou, Alain, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
[8] Russell, Catherine. *Experimental Ethnography. The Work of Film in the Age of Video*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009, p. 245.
[9] Badiou, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
[10] *Ibid*., pp. 84-85.

Badiou's thoughts mentioned above originated in a series of lectures he gave between 1998 and 2000, so he is thinking a century that is about to close. He has a bit more hindsight, than the filmmakers of the case studies presented in this thesis. It is as if this fin de siècle and end of millennium precipitates a great number of reflections on what the 20th century will have been. The last two decades are very productive years in the fields of art, film, technology and theoretical discourse. 1989 would be a pivotal year, in it multiple fronts reorganized and ruptured. It is the year of the demonstrations in the Tiananmen Square, the revolutions in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, the Soviet Union and Romania.[11] Many of these ruptures lead to a new period in global relations, with the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe leading to the end of the Cold War. Both the decade concluding in the year 1989 and the following decade offer a very fertile field for study.

Different historians cite different events and dates for the beginning of the Cold War, such as the Yalta Conference in 1945 or Stalin's speech "declaring a cold war" in 1946, in response to Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech. In any case, it seems it is usually understood as one of the outcomes of the Second World War. The end of the Cold War is commonly associated to the years 1989-1991. Although some argue the end began in 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev came into power, and others go as far back as 1979, to the Soviet 's invasion of Afghanistan.[12] Others, such as Richard Saull, defend it would be more precise to say that the Cold War did not have a singular ending, but rather a *series of endings*. It is important to take into account that there are many ways to define the Cold War itself. On the one hand, there are those who lean towards what has been called a "realist framework", in which the Cold War is seen as a bipolar relationship based on strategic competition, which was a consequence of the geopolitical arrangements brought about by the Second World War. On the other hand, there are those who take what has been called an "ideational" approach, which holds many points in common with the realist framework, but emphasizes on the importance of domestic political ideas, values and ideology on superpower behaviour and take more seriously the ideological character of the Cold War conflict and the way in which domestic political factors conditioned the bipolar relationship. In this view, what is paramount is that the Cold War is understood as "a social-ideological construction

[11] Zimmermann, Patricia Rodden. "The War on Documentary." In *States of Emergency. Documentaries, Wars, Democracies*, 3-50. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 16.
[12] Brager, Bruce L. *The Iron Curtain. The Cold War in Europe*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004, p. 109.

founded on distinct perceptions of self-identity and the social construction of an enemy."[13]

The domestic socio-economic properties of both the United States and the Soviet Union and their allies are essential issues in the understanding of the geopolitical conflict. The socio-economic constitution of each superpower was associated with or founded upon institutions, structures and relations conditioned by coercive and military power, and such forms of power determined the international relations of each superpower.[14] Consequently, the international expansion of one socio-economic system necessarily threatened the political security and social existence of the other. It is within this frame that we can understand the importance placed on domestic policies and ideology, in which images, specifically moving images, play a crucial role. Film and later television were two of the essential tools for each of the opposing ideologies to construct their image and that of their enemy; it is in them that we find the traces of the varied and complex discourses and values that built each of the superpowers' positions. It is in these images that the "enemy" of both factions is built, and again, it is with these images that that construction can be put into question. It is these very images that can be appropriated and used as tools to expose and counter said ideologies.

Needless to say, the relations between the two superpowers guiding this antagonistic relation varied and evolved during the years. During the decade of the 1970s there is a period commonly referred to as the "détente", although Soviet leaders favoured the term "peaceful co-existence". For many these years were determined by arms control agreements that reflected the common interest on the need to avoid nuclear war. It could be broadly defined as a relaxation of tension and a reduction of the likelihood of war, but in no case did it mean ideological co-existence. There were also other complex relations at work between the United States and the Soviet Union, which should be taken into account during these years, such as revolutionary change in what at the time was referred to as the "periphery" and political-economic developments in the West, specially in the United States. For the US the détente was a strategy to neutralize any advantage the USSR might gain from the inability of the US to deploy armed forces, to the extent it had in prior years, to confront the wave of revolution across the so-called third world between 1973 and 1979. However, by the end of the decade, the

[13] Saull, Richard. *The Cold War and After. Capitalism, Revolution and Superpower Politics*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007, p. 2.
[14] *Ibid*., p. 8.

US returned to a strategy based on militarism and confrontation.[15] The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 would put an end to this period. For some it would be the reason for a new period of strong antagonism, and marks the beginning of the "new" Cold War, which would be followed by the US and its nascent project of neoliberal globalization in the early 1980s.[16] While for others it signals the end of the Cold War.[17]

In any case, the decade of 1980 seemed to be the beginning of a turbulent time in the history of the Cold War, it started off with the intensification of superpower hostility and conflict, which was heightened after Reagan came into office in January 1981 and his subsequent first term. However, this hostility would not be long lived, since there would be a warming in the relations of both nations after Gorbachev's appointment as president of the Soviet Union in March 1985.[18] The 1980s saw important changes in the USSR. According to Saull, one determining factor was that Gorbachev "recognised the profound transformation of Western Europe, and Germany in particular, to a stable, liberal and pacific state that could not be seen as a threat to Soviet security as it had been in the past."[19] Two words that would be crucial in the evolution of domestic politics in the Soviet Union were already mentioned by Gorbachov in a speech in December 1984, which would be crucial for the years 1985-1987, *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (openness or transparency). Gorbachev believed the Soviet system was reformable, the political system could be liberalized and economic decision-making could be decentralized. Gorbachev complained that thinking about socialism had remained at the level of the 1930s and 1940s in many respects.[20] Much of the language he used had a different tone, especially noticeable since 1987, and in fact the Politburo members spent a lot of time agonizing over words, which underlines the importance of ideational change.[21]

At the same time, there are those, such as Archie Brown, who defend that president Reagan sent out mixed signals in his policies towards the Soviet Union. On one hand, Reagan stood out for his hard-line rhetoric and his vast investment in the arms build-up, which included the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDS), popularly known

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[15] Brown, Archie. *The Rise and Fall of Communism*. Harper Collins eBooks, 2009, p. 460; Saull, *op.cit*, pp. 151-152.
[16] Saull, *op.cit*., p. 153.
[17] Brager, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
[18] Saull, *op.cit*., p. 155.
[19] *Ibid* 168.
[20] Brown, *op.cit*., pp. 489-490.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 493.

as "Star Wars." But, on the other, Brown claims, Reagan also saw himself as a peacemaker who was ready to negotiate. [22]

The last year of the decade would see the fall of the Berlin Wall and revolution in central and Eastern Europe. The year 1989 was one of intense restructuring in the Eastern bloc, with what has been called by some the "Fall of the Outer Empire." Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania saw the effects of popular revolutions and Berlin saw the gathering of a crowd that would ultimately provoke the fall of its wall on November 9th 1989, and Germany would be officially reunited on October 3rd 1990. The Soviet Union would cease to exist on December 25th 1991, when Gorbachev suspended his functions as president.[23]

The break-up of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 resulted in the creation of fifteen successor states, which also owed much to the (mostly) peaceful transformation of Eastern Europe.[24] Consequently, during the 1990s the United States and its Western allies were able to use military power free from the threat of igniting a major war, and to promote the expansion of capitalism in former communist states and elsewhere.[25] It is during this time that the US-sponsored neoliberal economic globalisation took place through the structural adjustment policies of the IMF and World Bank, and "the creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 suggested that in the sphere of the global economic relations the world was becoming increasingly interconnected and homogenised along liberal lines."[26] The ends of the Cold War bequeathed new forms of conflict and "resistance" to the global projection of US power.[27] The end of the Cold War amounted to more than just a reconfiguration of geopolitical order and the balance of strategic-military power: social-economical transformation as well as a debris made of state officials, party leaders, military staff of Soviet bloc and revolutionary states, members of social movements and political parties, and guerrilla armies.[28]

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[22] In his defence of this other side of Reagan, Brown uses as proof a personal letter that the American president wrote to Brezhnev on April 1981, and "An important internal American government document (which remained classified until long after the Soviet Union had ceased to exist), entitled 'U.S. Relations with the USSR', was issued on 17 January 1983." It contained no desire to destroy the Soviet Union and it endorsed negotiations "consistent with the principle of strict reciprocity and mutual interest." Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 476-477.
[23] Brager, *op.cit.*, p. 112.
[24] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 503.
[25] Saull, *op.cit.*, p. 180.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 182.
[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

Technological Context

All of the events mentioned above, as well as the films discussed in the second part of the thesis, are coeval with specific developments of image technology. It is important to note that these films that serve as case studies are ten years apart (1982-1992), and during that decade the global political map shifts significantly, as does the technological landscape. Two common technological features stand out in both the 1980s and the 1990s, one is the dominance of television as a widespread means of communication and information, which produces content at a pace never seen before, and the second is the emergence and popularization of portable and relatively cheap video-cameras for non professional filmmakers.

During the first half of the 20th century, the film industry was just about the only non-print mass medium in existence. Radio emerged in the 1920s but it did not change the film distribution practices. Up until the major spread of televisions in homes, cinema was where many people went to find out what was going on in the world. Cinema covered the First World War, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. All this changed with television after World War II, which coincided with important changes in lifestyle, that there would be major disruptions in the film industry, [29] which shall be seen in Chapter 3. Starting with the Vietnam War most world events became thoroughly "recorded," "frozen," "captured" in a "multimedia memory bank available for future generations to peruse, review, and relive as 'history'."[30] This kind of coverage came with its own set of complex problems and would have a profound effect on future filmmakers. Among them the directors of *The Atomic Café*, to which Chapter 3 is dedicated, and *Videograms of a Revolution*, which is the focus of Chapter 4. In Emile de Antonio's words, "There is noting as bad that's happened concerning the war as the networks' coverage of if, because it seems as if they're covering the war whereas in fact they're not. The networks have made the American people, in a final way, comfortable with the war – because it appears between

[29] Wasser, Frederick. *Veni, Vidi, Vinci, Video. The Hollywood Empire and the Vcr*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001, p. 5.
[30] Alter, Nora M. "Reunification in a Decentered Lens: Ottinger and Ophüls." In *Projecting History: German Nonfiction Cinema, 1967-2000*, 151-93. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 152.

commercials, every day; it's become part of our quotidian existence, like armpit commercials."[31]

The new technologies of the 1980s, such as VCRs, camcorders, satellite and cable remapped the access and distribution of information and images.[32] The impact that VCRs and domestic video cameras would have is key, in the sense that for the first time in its history television's one-way transmissions could be challenged. Several new media "delivery systems" competed in the early 1970s, Sony's Betamax videocassette recorder (VCR), introduced in 1975, would succeed over the rest, until, in 1976, VHS surfaced. The instant popularity of the VCR was a surprise to powerful media players, who were not clear as to what the audience would do with it. It could be used for many purposes: to watch original programing, to watch television shows at times other than the scheduled broadcast, to watch mainstream movies and non-mainstream movies, and to watch amateur home recordings. Home video became a "major global culture industry." The VCR became widespread at the end of the 1970s, during the following decade it became the primary means for viewing movies, when it emerged as a mass medium, and it achieved stability by the middle of the 1990s.[33] Once recording at home was possible, it was also possible to appropriate images and juxtapose different sequences in any order the user thought fit. The VCR had its limitations, but it was the first step in paving the way of making appropriation of the moving image easy. The VCR would be soon replaced by DVD players and online services as means for watching films and television series, but its legacy has endured beyond its actual technology.[34] It has not only changed television, but also and more importantly the relationship users have with moving images and the ways these can be shared. It changed both image consumption among viewers as well as artistic practices.

As for the advent of video cameras, during the late 1960s and early 1970s the video recording equipment generally available to the artist was cumbersome, expensive and unreliable. This completely changed in the mid to late 1980s, by then, artists had regular access to lightweight and portable colour video camera/recorders capable of

[31] Weiner, Bernard. "Radical Scavenging: An Interview with Emile De Antonio." *Film Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Fall 1971 1971): 3-15, p. 7.
[32] Zimmermann, "The War on Documentary", p. 15.
[33] Wasser, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-4.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

producing near broadcast-quality images.[35] "The newly available and relatively inexpensive portable video recorder clearly empowered artists, politically active individuals and groups to fight back against the corporate monopoly 'one-way' broadcast television system."[36] It is this era of video creation and sharing played a significant role in the shaping of Internet.[37] The electronic technologies of the 1980s and the computer innovations from the 1990s have enabled the heterogeneous conversion of film and video, and an unprecedented access to materials. From VHS, to DVD, to *online* contents, the transference of cinematographical format to other technologies has guarantied a wide possibility of access to audiovisual material as has never happened before.[38]

The last decade of the 20th century has probably been the most active in the history of digital media, with the creation of all kinds of technological inventions. Since the 1990s there has been an explosion of companies and creators of software and hardware. The early 1990s saw the creation of hypertext for the World Wide Web, the establishing of the rules for HTTP transmission, and the development of the concept of URLs developed, as well as the birth of free software in 1991 thanks to Linus Torvakis. And the interval between 1994 and 1996 saw the consolidation of interactive applications.[39]

The public Internet was first proposed by J.C.R. Licklider of MIT in the early 1960s. It was conceived as a global network of computers to allow the sharing of scientific and military research. The project was conscripted by the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), and thanks to the work of several scientists it evolved to the global network of computers it is today. This network is the transport system that packets of data travel over and get from place to place, and it should not be confused with the World Wide Web, which has a different origin. In 1989, the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN) proposed the protocol that is now known as

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[35] Meigh-Andrews, Chris. *A History of Video Art*. Second ed. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 3.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[37] Hilderbrand, Lucas. "Youtube: Where Cultural Memory and Copyright Converge." *Film Quarterly* 61 no. 1 (Fall 2007 2007): 48-57.
[38] La Ferla, Jorge. "Memorias Audiovisuales Posanalógicas Y Predigitales. Por Una Praxis De Archivos En América Latina." *Secuencias. Revista de Historia de Cine* IV, no. 32 (Second Semester 2010 2010): 59-74, p. 71.
[39] Gifreu Castells, Arnau. "Moments of Convergence and Innovation between Documentary Film and Interactive Media: Dedade 1990-2010, Part 8." *MIT Open Doc Lab* (2014). http://opendoclab.mit.edu/moments-convergence-innovation-documentary-film-interactive-media-part-8. (Last accessed September 1 2015).

HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) and in 1991 the first World Wide Web pages or Web sites were put online. In 1993 a team at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) launched the browser called Mosaic, later rechristened as Netscape. Microsoft would eventually invade the browser market with Internet Explorer. But for most consumers, the "modern Internet Era" starts circa 1995 in the United States with online services (such as AOL), which did not use the public Internet. In the early days users dialled a number provided by the service and entered what is now called a "walled garden." In this walled garden, you could send and receive e-mail and could find pages that had the appearance of Web pages, but they were not. In those days users could not even type a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) into the address bar. But these "dial-up users" soon realized that you could use AOL to connect to the "real" Internet by using the dialer and then opening up a browser (like Netscape). Eventually the walled garden would open up.[40]

As for the development of television, 1989 was also the year of some of the most intense transnational media merger activity in history. It commenced a shift in the organization of communications along industry-specific lines into more synergistic global firms crossing technological and national borders, which lead to new media conglomerates.[41] These mergers were both coeval to, and produced a further blurring of boundaries, with the spread of neoliberal globalization. Some would argue that this brought with it the "spread of democratic values." However, whilst certain liberal sectors have celebrated globalization the spread of liberal democracy, and its widening of capitalist markets, there seems to be a contradiction between strengthening the social power wielded by market forces against the wakening of collective-public authority rested in democratic institutions. Resulting in the widening of socio-economic inequality.[42]

Zimmermann argues, 1989 saw the acceleration of media restructuring, the precipitation of the global reorganization of media democracy.[43] Recorded moving images were created and transmitted, at a pace and in an abundance that was

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[40] Palmer, Shelly. *Television Disrupted. The Transition from Network to Networked Tv*. Burlington and Oxford: Focal Press, 2006, pp. 32-33.
[41] Zimmermann, "The War on Documentary", p. 17.
[42] Saull, *op. cit.,* pp. 183-184.
[43] Zimmermann, Patricia Rodden. "States of Emercency. An Introduction." In *States of Emergency. Documentaries, Wars, Democracies*, xv-xxiii. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. xvi-xvii.

unprecedented. They created an overflowing archive that threatened to flatten differences and complexities, but at the same time recording devices left those images within reach and ready to be worked on, and it is precisely this accessibility which enabled a dialogue between images, critique and contestation with the images themselves.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided in two parts, the first part serves as a theoretical frame to the films that will be seen at length in the second part. This first part consists of two chapters; Chapter 1 offers a reflection on Esfur Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, a pioneering film of historical compilation. I use it as a practical example of a film that recycles footage of a historical event in an elaborate discourse, although in a very different way than the films that are seen at length in the second part of the thesis. However, it makes clear that many of the main concerns when approaching the films of the 1980s and 1990s that I am interested stem back practically to the origins of cinema. But at the same time, it is essential to see this film on its own, since it is quite different to the other two. Chapter 2 deals directly with the theoretical concerns of the thesis. It is divided in three sections, which correspond to reflections on "documentary" as a problematic genre, the recycling of footage and the different names such practice has received, and the idea of essaying with moving images. I am not pursuing a classification for these films, I am not intent on arguing what they are or what they are not, but I believe that these films have elements that relate to all three practices. The intention is not to create a grid in which to fit them in, but rather offer several prisms through which to look at them, in order to try to engage with their richness and complexity without being prescriptive. Under these three distinct rubrics (documentary, appropriation film and essay film), I try to offer three ways of thinking the films, none of them fit perfectly into any of the three categories. But the idea is to have an additional approach of what these films are capable of doing, of what they make possible, what they say about such categories and such categorizing systems.

The second part of the thesis is divided in two chapters. Chapter 3, is dedicated to *The Atomic Cafe* and Chapter 4 focuses on *Videograms of a Revolution*. These two films might seem like a striking pairing, but I believe they have enough elements in common to be put together in this thesis, and enough differences so as to cover many of the concerns that recycling moving images as a means for historical inquiry raises. And

Shub's pioneering film, which is used as an introduction to a series of issues that have been present practically since the inception of moving images and that remain prescient today. One of which is the need to interrogate images, specifically factual images that serve as the records of historical events. All three films appropriate historical footage, they "hijack" it, they take it out of context and inscribe it in a new discourse, they offer the possibility to see these images anew.

They have some common cultural referents, such as the influence of television, both the members of The Archives Project and Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica form part of the first generation of filmmakers that were born and grew up with television, that were teenagers or young adults when the portapak was made available, and were young adults when VCRs and cheaper and easier to use portable domestic cameras started to be commercialized. In the words of a contemporary filmmaker to Farocki, Ujica and the members of The Archives Project, American filmmaker Abigail Child, "My generation of filmmakers, people born after World War II – we are TV kids. We were easily influenced by media and by how the media influenced our worlds. (…) Now what I think a lot of us are doing: we're using emotional images, images that mean something to us, powerful, resonant images – not taking just anything, but being attentive to what images say and mean and how they can be read, actually approaching the flow of image-meaning, representation."[44]

The years the directors of *The Atomic Cafe* worked on their film corresponded with what has come to be known as "New Hollywood", which is used to refer to a new cohort of directors, which includes Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, and George Lucas and their work from the mid 1970s and 1980s. While still relatively young, these directors were offered big budgets to make high-profile films, making every film a "make-or-break proposition for everyone involved." Consequently, every film was treated as an event by the directors as well as the marketing and distribution executives.[45] These filmmakers were also looking back in many of their productions, during those years, creating what are now known as nostalgia films, of which Spielberg's *American Graffiti* (1973) is commonly accepted as the inaugural film. Jameson criticises them harshly as an indictment of consumer capitalism and as a

[44] Wees, William C. "Speaking of Found Footage." In *Recycled Images. The Art and Politics of Found Footage Film*, 65-99. New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993, p. 71.
[45] Wasser, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

"symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history."[46] For others this recurrence to pop culture and past images has more to do with film literacy, such as Noel Carroll and Vera Dika.

What *The Atomic Cafe* demonstrates is how the image bank of this era, which is being intensely fetished, can also be used to create new texts that speak of current issues. They are not alone in this, in fact Catherine Russell writes of a "revival" in the 1980s of "collage forms of filmmaking" that recur to the imagery of the 1950s.[47] She terms this particular strand within found footage filmmaking "Atomic Ethnography", of which Bruce Conner would be the clearest and earliest exponent.[48] Conner, and his films *A Movie* (1958) and *Crossroads* (1976), were a big influence for The Archives Project, and like him, they explore the "cult value" of media images, specifically with the recycling of atomic imagery. For Russell 1950s were essential, it was in this decade that the use of television and film archives became apocalyptic, "It is the collage style of the age of television that renders history and memory unstable and fragmentary."[49] And the 1950s remain a key cultural site and privilege archive for collage filmmakers working in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Craig Baldwin, Leslie Thornton and Abigail Child, as well as the directors of *The Atomic Cafe*.

The Atomic Cafe is made exclusively of recycled footage, and most of this footage comes from marginal productions (such as military instruction films and educational films), most of it is ephemeral and was not meant as an artistic or perdurable endeavour. This is precisely what makes this material so interesting decades later, since it offers the "out-takes," the "rubble," what has become démodé, in contrast to the images that had been deemed worthy of conservation and/or were still being broadcast on television as reruns. The images are highly recognizable because the propaganda of the atomic era in the United States was highly coded, and nuclear propaganda was shaped in the same manner, and by the same means and professionals, than the propaganda of consumer goods. The film covers a very specific period, one that is seen with nostalgia at the time. The effectiveness of their subversion of the material has to do with this specific timing.

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[46] Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In *The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1993*, 1-20. London: Verso, 1998, p. 10.
[47] Russell, *op.cit.*, p. 241.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 246.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

It might seem problematic to see this film as an essay film, however, I would like to argue that it does have essayistic qualities. It uses imagery of the 1950s by way of irony and satire. It not only re-edits propagandistic material, it replicates the very structure of propaganda in its recourse to saturation, there is a sense of accumulation, of a message being repeated *ad nauseam*. It also addresses 1980s nostalgia towards a "simpler, happier time," by using one of the recourses of this revival fashion, ellipsis. It does not go into all the convulsive events of the 1960s and 1970s, which was precisely what this nostalgic fad was omitting. It links the 1950s and 1980s directly, just like other mainstream cultural products of the time. However, what they highlight is a very different similarity between the two decades: the charged anti-communist rhetoric, and the strategy of creating fear towards an abstract enemy, which is said to threaten an entire way of life.

As for *Videograms of a Revolution*, the influence of television can be seen not only in its depiction of historical events, but also the very role it plays in the construction of the events it supposedly represents is crucial in the construction of their film. The film production of Germany up until the late 1980s was dominated by the so-called New German Cinema, which has been defined as "the state-supported, but relatively independent film production of the Federal Republic of Germany between 1962 and 1989."[50] It coinciding with the building and falling of the Berlin Wall (1961-1989) and saw the coexistence of many styles, political claims, and production strategies, it was dominated by *Autorenfilme*, essay or feature films by directors who also wrote.[51] Among the directors included in such a wide category we can include Rainer Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, and AlexanderKluge.

In this cinema, there is a particular approach to German history, or traces of it, according to Nora M. Alter New German Cinema "addressed the past with an aggressive platform that called for radically different films about a new vision of history."[52] These filmmakers were by and large avidly anti-imperialist, they were part of the leftist protests against U.S. imperialism, specifically in Vietnam. This anti-imperialism was also accompanied by the perception of many of these filmmakers that

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[50] Davidson, John E. *Deterritorializing the New German Cinema*. Minneapois and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 1.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] Alter, Nora M. *Projecting History. German Nonfiction Cinema, 1967-2000*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002, pp. 5-6, cit.p. 6.

the West German government itself was in certain ways connected to the Nazi past. It includes the first classes of the newly founded German Film and Television Academy in Berlin (DFFB).[53] However, Alter points out how most studies on German postwar film focus almost exclusively on feature films of this so-called New German Cinema. However, many of the filmmakers included in this category have also made significant contributions in the area of nonfiction.[54] For Alter, nonfiction German cinema, as opposed to much of the traditional narrative film production in postwar Germany, has lived up to the radicalism of New German Cinema's initial project of social criticism.[55] Within the rich panorama of nonfiction films produced between 1967 and 2000, Alter speaks of films produced after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which attempt to understand postreunification Germany, among which she includes *Videograms of a Revolution*.[56]

The year 1989, which was pivotal in the remapping of global relations, both on a political and economic level and in the world of communication. Patricia R. Zimmermann goes as far as arguing that 1989 "marked the beginning of a new historical period for the triad of politics, democracy and documentary."[57] In the particular case of Germany, the 1990s saw the explosion of films on the fall of communism in Germany, and many of these films could be said to be documentary to one degree or another. Nora M. Alter argues, "The images appear over and over again, seemingly from a single collective pool or closed economy of signs: the same interviews (…), the same overall tone and mood imputing to a passive viewer a unified view."[58] It is not surprising that this event would be so present in film production since ass Brager states, even if the so-called "Iron Curtain" was a symbolic figure it had a geographic centre: West Berlin, where one did in fact find a wall built of concrete and steel since 1961.[59] But as Alter notes, the sheer quantity of moving images that captured and represented that moment did not make it more understandable. In fact, "Film footage was producing a filmic barrier."[60] And it is in this sense that certain nonfiction filmmakers played an important role in offering detailed, complex and even contradictory reflections on these events.

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[53] Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.
[54] Alter, *Projecting Hisitory*, p. 3.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[56] Alter, "Reunification in a Decentered Lens: Ottinger and Ophüls".
[57] Zimmermann, "The War on Documentary", p. 16.
[58] Alter, "Reunification in a Decentered Lens: Ottinger and Ophüls", p. 157.
[59] Brager, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[60] Alter, "Reunification in a Decentered Lens: Ottinger and Ophüls", p. 157.

It is important to point out how the years commonly depicted as the years of the fall of communism are also the same years in which "the walls between all the media that produce and/or document such occurrences are increasingly fluid, and any referential truth-content becomes difficult to grasp."[61] This standardized view of the fall of communism, that Nora Alter is describing is in reference to Germany, but I find it is applicable to many of the images generated in other eastern European countries during and immediately after the demise of their communist regimes. In all cases, globalized television networks transmitted the same images and sounds of the fall of the Berlin Wall, of Ceausescu in Romania and of the different revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe. Nora Alter writes: "A world-wide audience ostensibly became united in its consumption –its illusion of coproduction – of the collapse and attendant funeral of socialism and communism and the coterminous triumph of liberal democracy."[62] Their relentless repetition did not make these images any clearer, they were presented "as if they were phenomenologically unmediated and required no analysis."[63]

Farocki and Ujica took it upon themselves to work, think and make a film with the images of the Romanian Revolution. Together with the state television's images they edited multiple image taken by amateur videographers. What the films shows is not only a historical event as captured by mechanical records, but the erosion of established categories, such as spectator and actor, television studio and street. What we see is the setting in motion of a transformation from viewers to image-makers, an expansion of perspective, of verbal privilege. We see the transmissions of the national television and the images of those who moved from their living rooms to the streets, and back. What they also make visible are the blind spots of the historical event, and how it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate historical event from media event, how there are no unmediated events and how we are mediated beings.

Both films, *The Atomic Cafe* and *Videograms of a Revolution* are demanding of the spectator. One way to understand the kind of demands they make of their spectator is see them not only as cinematographical objects, but as experiences as well. This shall be present in the discussions in the following chapters, where Sobchack's phenomenological approach to cinema in general, and to documentary in particular, will

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 152.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 154.
[63] *Ibid*.

be very present. These films pose their own set of questions because of the way they use historical footage. What is offered to the spectator is a new experience of certain historical events through the images that have come to represent those events. What is more, the figure of the spectator is present in both *The Atomic Cafe* and *Videograms of a Revolution*. There is a mirroring effect, an allusion to future spectators, which at the same time unites and separates us with the spectators *in* the film. What is opening up to the spectators *of* the film, among which I include myself, is a space for reflection, a detention, a looking back, an opportunity to arrive to our own questions. In this sense, these films are exercises in Culture Studies, written in images.

Methodology

The methodology followed has been a tentative one, which has varied with each film. I have started by situating each of them in a context, speaking of the directors and how the films were produced and I have offered a detailed synopsis of each. I have elaborated extensively on how each of the films writes from its present time on the past that the recycled images capture. I have insisted in the relationship between those different temporalities.

As I have stated above, I have tried to avoid rigid, isolated categories, and instead attempted to offer tentative suggestions of what these films can *do* by seeing them in relation to different contexts among tendencies of nonfiction (recycling and essaying), which are themselves linked to shifts in practices of image production, in the intersection of technical and historical forces, and have a profound effect on the way history can be experienced through the traces of certain events and the dialogue between different time periods.

As for the bibliography used, there is combination of many fields of study. Each chapter builds on the chapters preceding it, taking the argument further without losing sight of the concerns that are constant in this study. For this reason, the ideas of some of the authors whose work has guided many of the following discussions can be perceived transversally in the thesis. In this sense several of Walter Benjamin's ideas, such as his notion of historical materialism, the idea of author as producer and the destruction of experience and the figure of the storyteller. Giorgio Agamben's discussion of history and play has also played a central role in my conceptualization of the effects of recycling footage. Jacques Rancière's ideas of the emancipated spectator has also influenced many of the arguments put forward in the following pages. The

ideas of Hito Steyerl and Vivian Sobchack have also had a strong impact on my reflections on these films. And, in the last stages of writing, I have seen myself forced to put my own ideas under scrutiny after the publication of Jaime Baron's *The Archive Effect* in late 2014, with which I share many concerns.

Each film has presented its own challenges and its own bibliographical difficulties. In all cases I have found it of paramount importance to give some historical background to the times of production of the films, as well as the time of production of the original material they recycle. I have done so with the understanding that re-edited footage proves to be enormously challenging, since this repurposing renders is it even more mediated, while it might hold the appearance of an immediate approximation to a historical period, since these images are historical documents.

For Esfir Shub, confronted with the scarcity of material published in English, or any language other than Russian, and even the difficulty to access Russian bibliography on the filmmaker, I have recurred to indirect sources, such as publications on Dziga Vertov and news articles of the time. In addition to the few chapters some English books have dedicated to her. Her presence in the Internet has grown over the last few years and I have taken articles and blog entries into account and gleaned some new information in these sources, but there is still much that could be studied and published regarding her work. In the case of *The Atomic Cafe*, I have encountered much more information but I find it still lacks an in depth study. I have been able to access many reviews the film received in its time and other published at the time of its reissuing in DVD. It also is present in many manuals concerning found footage, "new documentary" and other niche categories of film studies, but it has not been treated in extension in these publications. As for *Videograms of a Revolution*, it has been easier to find a series of articles and book chapters that offer detailed analyses of the film. The bibliography on Harun Farocki is quite rich and is increasingly growing in recent years; also Farocki himself was quite a prolific writer. However, it has been harder to find bibliography on Andrei Ujica in English. In any case, for this last film when confronted with the bibliography it has been more an issue of selection and I have centred my focus, beyond the articles and chapters dedicated specifically to the film. I have found it necessary to take into special account texts related to Harun Farocki's ideas on editing and on history as it relates to recorded images as well as interviews of both filmmakers. But I have intended to widen my scope in order to think of the film in relation to several theoretical

concerns regarding documentary tendencies in contemporary art and film, event and performative theories, as well as the construction of actuality.

I also find it necessary to signal some bibliographic omissions, which are not accidental, notably those of the classification systems by film scholars Michael Renov and Bill Nichols. These authors are not completely absent in the thesis, in first place, because they are not without mention, however, I have not gone into Nichols' documentary modes (poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative), or into Renov's tendencies of documentaries (to record, persuade, analyse or express).[64] And, in second place, because their influence can be felt through other authors referenced throughout the thesis. Another omission that I find necessary to address is that of Gilles Deleuze's books on cinema, however interesting and insightful, a detailed consideration of them would have lead the thesis down a completely different path. I have, however, used other texts by Deleuze such as "Having an Idea in Cinema (On the Cinema of Straub-Huillet)" and a series of reflections compiled in the book *Negotiations*.[65] In these works I have found essential elements of his thoughts on cinema and philosophy that refer to specific concerns of the thesis.[66]

I have taken it upon myself to think the films in relation to certain categories (documentary, appropriation film and essay film), because of the fact that these categories are difficult to define, are complex in their relationship to film, to reality, to history and its representation, can say a lot about the films. When reflecting on the films under these, sometimes complementary and sometimes contradicting, prisms it is not with the intention of writing a history of these concepts or of offering a tighter definition of the categories. What I have aimed for is more of a critical attempt to identify possibilities, potentialities, within conceptual breaks, gaps and contradictions. In the tensions and ruptures between categories, as well as in certain similarities is where I have found the most intriguing questions. The_two films that serve as case studies (*The Atomic Cafe* and *Videograms of a Revolution*), as well as the introductory film *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, have offered me the opportunity to tackle issues

[64] Nichols, Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*. Second ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.; Michael Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
[65] Deleuze, Gilles, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995.
[66] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989; Gilles Deleuze, "Have an Idea in Cinema (On the Cinema of Straub-Huillet", Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (Eds) *New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, University of Minnesora Press, Minneapolis, 1998.

that are relevant to current and complex problematics that we encounter in art and film influenced and made with digital technologies and online platforms. During this specific time period, the 1980s and 1990s, there is a particular confluence of changing orders where things remain up in the air, as it were. Historically and politically these years correspond with the final years of the Cold War, its fall and the years prior to what was later known as "the War on Terror." Technologically it is a moment when diffusion of media on an international scale is an established fact, yet the Internet and digital formats have not come to full fruition; and within the dominating cultural productions of the West we can talk of art of appropriation and postproduction, as well as a new introduction of moving images into the museum and the initial decline of a way of experiencing film.

In a way I am presenting three different orders of moving images in relation to three different time periods. First, there is an examination of the effect of cinema in the (re)presentation of historical events with Esfir Shub's film, which has to do with a certain notion of history, that of Universal History, as well as a specific way of understanding the relationship between photographic image and reality. There is a very interesting relationship between outright propaganda and critique potential. In second place, there is a detailed view of television as a tool for propaganda and entertainment with the Archive Collective's *The Atomic Cafe*, which signals to a different notion of history, if you will, postmodern. It is an anti-nostalgic work made in a climate of nostalgia, in a time of "restoration", a time that seemed to idealize a false symbolic continuation between the prosperous 1950s and a post-Vietnam, post economical crisis 1980s in the United States. And, in last place, *Videograms of a Revolution*, demonstrates some of the possibilities that domestic video recordings offer in contrast to television, understood as the medium of legitimation of established power, as well the new problems this "democratization of means of communication" poses. As Nam June Paik argued, "TV has been attacking us all our lives – now we can attack back."[67]

[67] Quoted in Chris Meigh-Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

PART I

Chapter 1

THE FALL OF THE ROMANOV DYNASTY BY ESFIR SHUB

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty (1927) is the first film directed by Esfir Shub and the first instalment of her trilogy portraying Russia's recent past. Esfir Shub was one of very few female directors to achieve prominence in the 1920s. She edited more than two hundred foreign films and ten domestic feature films;[68] she directed more than twelve films, wrote two books, and was considered one of the supreme masters of montage.[69] Since 1932 she also lead the editing section of Eisenstein's directing classes in the State Film Institute.[70] Mayakovsky described her as "the pride of our cinema"[71] and she would come to embody the ideal of the "new soviet woman."[72]

The film was Shub's own initiative; it was her way of contributing to the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the February Revolution. She started working on the film in 1926 and it was released in March of 1927. It was regarded as a success and was followed by intense debates on the important role film, especially documentary or "unplayed" film, occupied within the new Soviet state, and particularly on how this new regime should be represented in cinema, "the most important of all the arts."[73]

The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty gave a historical account of the events that prompted the revolution from a Bolshevik perspective, and it did so with the use of footage that had been shot previously, some of which had been screened as part of different newsreels. Most of this material had been deemed irrelevant or outright anti-revolutionary. The construction of the film involved an innovative approximation to film both as historical document and as a new language capable of expressing ideas

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[68] Murray-Brown, Jeremy. "Esfir Il'inishna Shub." In *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*: Jewish Women's Archive, 2009. http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/shub-esfir (Last accessed November 24 2012); and Petric, Vlada. "Esther Shub: Film as a Historical Discourse." In *Show Us Life. Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*, edited by Tomas Waugh, 21-46. Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1984, p. 25.

[69] Attwood, Lynne ed. *Red Women on the Silver Screen. Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Communist Era*. London: Pandora Press, 1993, p. 33.

[70] Hagener, Malte. *Moving Forward, Looking Back. The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919-1939*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007, p. 136.

[71] Mayakovsky, Vladimir. "Speech in Debate on 'the Paths and Policy of Sovkino'" 15 October 1927." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 171-74. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 172.

[72] Attwood, *op. cit,*, p. 141.

[73] Lenin's famous statement: "*of all the arts for us the most important is cinema*" seemed to derive from a conversation with Lunacharsky (head of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment). Lunacharsky, Anatoli. "Conversation with Lenin. I. Of All the Arts...". In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1936*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 56-57. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 57.

through the combination of visual documents - i.e. montage - as one combines the letters of an alphabet to compose words.

It was not the first time a director recycled footage from previous newsreels, for "the practice is as old as the newsreel itself."[74] This recycling of footage was not exclusive to newsreel either, for the practice of using earlier films - what some now call found footage - as the raw material for new works of cinema has a history that dates back almost to the very origins of cinema.[75] And it was not the first time that it had been done by a Russian director or put at the service of the revolutionary cause. What was noteworthy about the film was the articulation of Tsarist material, thus "counter-revolutionary" material, into a Bolshevik discourse signalling the multiple *potentialities of film*, the possibility of turning the original meaning of sequences on their head and converting what might have been deemed as *waste into something of value*. Shub, in Leyda's words, was who brought "discipline and strength to the new problems and possibilities latent in the rapidly accumulating store of non-current newsreels."[76] Shub did not recur to this material out of need but purposefully. The material itself was what was important in Shub's recounting of the history of the February Revolution; for her the fact that this material was the contemporary visual record of the time she was portraying made it more "authentic" than any other possible staging of the Revolution.

The other two films that complete this trilogy are *The Great Way* (or *The Great Road*)[77] and *The Russia of Nicholas II and Tolstoy*. The former was also released in 1927 and it started where *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* ended, 1917, covering the accomplishments of the ten years of Bolshevik government, and used footage from that period. The latter is from 1928 and the footage in use is from the years between 1897 and 1912.

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[74] Leyda, Jay. *Films Beget Films. Compilation Films from Propaganda to Drama*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1964, p. 13.
[75] Yeo, Rob. "Cutting through History: Found Footage in Avant-Garde Filmmaking." In *Cut. Film as Found Object in Contemporary Video*, edited by Stefano Basilico, 13-27. Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 2004, p. 13; and Leyda, *op. cit*., pp. 13-14.
[76] Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 23
[77] Petric states another possible name for this film is *Ten Years*. Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

1.2. THE FILM

1.2.1. SYNOPSIS

The film starts with images of the Tsarist Russia in the years of the "black reaction", as announced by the intertitle. What we see are what Bolsheviks would deem images of conservatism, such as the Kremlin of the Romanovs, priests in procession in Moscow, soldiers, a policeman and crowds. All of these images represent "types", there are no personal attributes in the depictions of people, they represent different elements of obedience to the Tsar, as is made clear by the title following the images: "Obedient to the Czar, the State Duma was in session in St. Petersburg", and the exact figures of social groups that conformed the 445 members of the Duma, which is made of a great majority of gentry and landowners (241), some members of the bourgeoisie (74) and some members of the clergy (43). The text is illustrated by the images of different officials such as priest deputies and the president of the Duma, Rodzyanko; even when singled out, they still remain as "types", as representations of the old regime.

After reading "Czarist deputy-governors ruled the country", we are shown provincial towns where we find "peace and quiet", as if detained in time. We see images of monasteries and of the landowners' lands that according to the film's titles covered enormous expanses, with vast fields and large herds of cattle. These images are quickly contrasted by the words "And next to them – land-short, poverty-stricken villages" followed by images of modest rural settings that heavily contrast with the lands of the clergy and landowners. We see how a local governor is amused having what seems like breakfast or tea with his wife and dog and how the gleaners diligently work. Preceded by the very effective words "The peasants' labor under the yoke on the landowners' land".

The following segment shows us the nobility, the conservative press, and military parades; i.e. the loyal subjects are being presented. Next, Nicholas II is introduced through his signature, his regiments, and sailors in formation on deck on a sea cruise. One of the most cited sequences of the film takes place at this moment: the image of ladies of the court dancing the mazurka "until they perspired", as stated by the title, followed by peasants whipping sweat of their brows and the words "They toiled in the landowners' forests, on the merchants' rafts, on the water, in the landowners' fields, in the factories and mills of the capitalists, in the deep mines, in the dark stone

quarries", and each of these activities are portrayed with their corresponding images. The audacity of placing side by side the ladies dancing and the sweaty workers has been mentioned in almost every text that speaks of the film,[78] and the fact that she takes her time to enumerate so many hardworking occupations and show them on screen, creates a sense of weight, of accumulation. By juxtaposition the frivolous aristocracy being entertained with the dramatic conditions of the workers she is addressing the steep difference in the lives a vast majority of unprivileged hard working people and a very few privileged ladies and gentlemen in their beautiful white dresses and uniforms. At this point, one might think if there were so many under the yoke why did they not rebel? Well, the following images show where those who did rise against the regime went: prison and exile.

For the first time an exact date is specified: 24-27 May 1913, when the celebrations of the 300 years of Romanov Dynasty took place. She shows different images of the celebrations and the imperial court, as well as the images of the well-to-do enjoying themselves. We see the images of markets, speculators, banks and capitalists, followed by the title "Those who did their bidding" and the images of generals and war ministers. All these images are used to illustrate the self-complacency and indifference of the ruling classes. In the meantime the preparations for war were being put into motion, as we can read in the title "Technology was perfecting new means of destruction". Shub shows us these new means of destruction, the factories they come out of, those who are benefited by the war, "those who would be sent to the slaughter", as well as those workers who "were preparing death for their brothers". Shub now seems to be hinting at the fact that the tsarist regime maintains the same inequalities in war as in peace, by contrasting officers' dinners and that of regular soldiers. She establishes a divide between the happy well-to-do people and the European government who she calls the "organizers of the world wide slaughter" and the "simple" people who were to be sacrificed.

We see the imperial declaration of war signed July 20th 1914. We see how the peasants are taken away from the fields and the workers from the factories. All those spaces that she insistently covered at the beginning of the film are being deserted. We

[78] Such as: Weinrichter, Antonio. *Metraje Encontrado: La Apropiación En El Cine Documental Y Experimental*. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2009, p. 44; Attwood, *op. cit.*, p. 33; Roberts, Graham. *Forward Soviet! History and Non-Fiction Film in the Ussr*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999, pp. 52-53. It is also the films most famous passage due to its reuse in other films suchas as Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1989-1998) and Chris Maker's *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* (1991), as pointed out by Weinricher, *Metraje encontrado*, p. 44.

see more and more troops, in more and more locations. We see the trenches, the training, the tanks, aircrafts and ships. We are confronted with the words "Killed, wounded, maimed in the World War 35 MILLION"; we see lifeless bodies, destruction, and debris. Next we see the image of two women, who are static, quiet, whose stillness contrasts with all the male movement of the previous images or with the movement of the women working at the very beginning. There is nothing in the image that can completely assure us that this image corresponds to the war, to the dwelling of the sorrow it brought. However, in relation to the images that precede and follow it, it is hard to not consider it so. It is one small moment of quietude before Shub goes back to her chains of images, this time showing the prisoners, the wounded, the refugees, as well as fields being burnt, and more reserves being thrown to attack. When women reappear it is working in the war plants.

Afterwards we are told about the shortage of provisions, shortage of news from the front, we see people visiting wounded relatives in the hospitals, death and communal graves, the cold winter, the priests blessing the troops, the bourgeoisie giving out little gifts… "But the front, discontented and embittered had been suffering defeats and was falling to pieces… they were leaving the front lines". In representation of this we see soldiers walking in the snow, but there is no way of knowing if they are really leaving the front, or where they are heading. We also see bodies in the snow.

Towards the end of the film the number of texts increases significantly, both in the form of filmed documents and in the form of titles. We see proclamations from the Central Committee of Bolsheviks, notices from the commander of troops, extracts of *Pravda* (the newspaper). We are also shown demonstrations where different "pro-Bolshevik" banners can be seen within the crowds. Shub quotes extracts from Lenin's *A Letter From Afar*. We learn of the events of the last days of February through texts. We see crowds in Moscow and Petrograd. Soldiers uniting with demonstrators, an arrested policeman… The Tsar's world, that we saw at the beginning of the film, is unravelling. "The servants of the hateful regime were being arrested and sent of to the prisons where the freedom-fighters, now liberated by a free people, had been languishing".

We read of the abdication of "Nicholas the Bloody" on March4th, followed by the image of crowds cheering and broken tsarist symbols, destroyed by the people just as they had destroyed the oppressors. This is followed by images of "the funeral of victims of the peoples fight for freedom", we see funeral processions, coffins… but since the regime has fallen and they are treated as heroes, she is trying to convey the

feeling that those deaths have not been in vain. The remainder of the film is composed of texts and images of crowds, who will be met by Lenin, seen from a low angle, he is the only individual figure among the crowds, and the crowds are cheering and clapping for him. The closing scene is that of a few people shaking hands with Lenin, welcoming him back to the motherland, signalling the beginning of the future.

1.2.2. GETTING THINGS STARTED: ESFIR SHUB

Esfir Il'inishna Shub (1894[79]-1959) was born into a lower middle-class family of landowners in Suroh (Ukraine).[80] She moved to Moscow before the Revolution to prepare for her entry to the seminar in Russian Literature at Moscow's Institute for Women's Higher Education. While studying literature, she spent much of her time with the family of Alexander Ertel, a famous writer at the time, whose home was frequented by important literary and theatre people, such as Mayakovsky, Bely, and Burlyuk. They were part of the avant-garde movement posited against the Tsar's cultural policy and critical of traditional art.[81] After the Revolution, she applied for a job in government, "feeling that she could contribute something to the culture of the new regime."[82]

In 1918, she was assigned to work in the Theatre Department of the Peoples Commissariat for Education (Narkompros) with Vsevolod Meyerhold, the director of the October Theatre, as his secretary.[83] It was there that she met a young soldier returning from the front named Sergei Eisenstein, with whom she would developed a passion for cinema and a life long friendship.[84] Shub's vision of cinema was marked with the same enthusiasm as her application for a job in government, cinema offered in her words: "a method of expressing all that the Great October Revolution had brought… A new life was beginning. New people were building this life. In art – another October. Forward, innovators, seekers of the new roads! Cinematography is the art of the future."[85] Shub did not study cinema and her transition from theatre to film was not an

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[79] There is a slight discrepancy when it comes to her exact date of birth, Petric states it as March 13th 1894 (Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 22); and Murray-Brown gives March 16th 1894 as Shub's date of brith (Murray-Brown, *op. cit.*).
[80] Murray-Brown, *op. cit.*; Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[81] Petric, *op.cit.,* p. 22
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] Attwood, *op. cit.*, p. 143; Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 22; Murray-Brown, *op. cit.*
[84] Attwood, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
[85] Quoted in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 50

easy one,[86] however, she did manage to get a job in the film section of the Commissariat re-editing and re-titling foreign films to "render them ideologically sound."[87]

In 1922 Shub entered the distribution office of Goskino,[88] the very same year Goskino was created. At that time, the role of editor was not a clearly defined one; it was understood as an auxiliary role.[89] Perhaps for that very reason it was a common employment for women in the film industry; sadly, it was "all that women could normally hope for on the production side of the Soviet film industry."[90] Leyda goes even further describing the work of editing at that time as a "generally despised employment."[91]

Her intense labour as an editor would be her only training and would have a crucial effect on her understanding of film, in her words: "My study of cinema was not in a school. My university was the editing table, my friends, cameramen, several directors of feature films, and Dziga Vertov. Although we often argued with him -- I could not accept his total disavowal of films based on scripts -- I admired his great talent."[92]

Shub is the only woman known to have worked in the montage bureau of Goskino editing foreign films to suit them to Bolshevik standards. Goskino was an exception within the Soviet film industry, in the sense that editors could exercise and develop their creativity without being overshadowed by a director.[93] The members of the montage bureau at the time formed a kind of professional elite club.[94] This elite group also enjoyed re-editing in their spare time and gathering together to share their montage jokes and wit.[95] Shub mentored Eisenstein in his first cinema related job,

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[86] Roberts mentions that she secured this job "After a number of false starts and refused applications." Roberts, *op. cit.*, p, 50.

[87] *Ibid*.; and according to Tsivian, this practice of catering foreign films to Bolshevik acceptability received the name *peremontazh*, which meant the reworking of a film to suit it to a country other than that of its originin, and it included retitling, altering the main title, changing carácter names and adding new scenes. Tsivian, Yuri. "The Wise and Wicked Game: Re-Editing and Soviet Film Culture of the 1920s." *Film History* 8 (1996): 327-43, p. 327.

[88] Goskino: acronym for State Cinema organisation 1922-1924. It was the first Soviet centralised state cinema organisation, established in December 1922, within the Council of People's Commissars. (Taylor and Christie (eds) *The Film Factory*, p. 53)

[89] Stollery, Martin. "Eisenstein, Shub and the Gender of the Author as Producer." *Film History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 87-99, p. 95. To see how the re-editing worked specifically, go to Tsivian, *op. cit.*

[90] Murray-Brown, *op.cit.*.

[91] Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[92] Roberts, *op. cit*, p. 50.

[93] Stollery, *op. cit* p. 95.

[94] Tsivian, *op. cit*, p. 336.

[95] Both Leyda and Tsivian describe anecdotes. Tsivian quotes Eisenstein, who is fascinated by the trick played by Boitler (another member of the group who was considered to be a genius of editing) on the German film *Danton* with Emil Jannings. In the original film there was a sequence where Danton ran to

which consisted in assisting her, at the montage bureau of Goskino, in the re-editing of Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse*,[96] which received the new title *The Gilded Rot* or *Gilded Mould.*[97] Shub seems to have been a prominent member within this small group, Leyda points out that she was exceptionally talented, "she brought intelligence, taste and a sense of social responsibility". [98] On occasions she would be handed scraps without any indication of order and had to transform them into releasable films. This intense work of examination and analysis of images, their re-articulation into films that could be released eschewing their bourgeois origin, granted Shub great skill in montage and gave her a privileged view of what cinema could accomplish without the need of filming new material. In her words: "I became fully aware of the magic power of the scissors in the hands of someone who uses montage to express himself visually as he uses the alphabet to express himself verbally."[99]

Nonetheless, Goskino seems to have been an exception, since in general there were no quality standards in re-editing before 1924. Distributors felt that this work must be professionalized, in their terms it should be "raised to the new level of quality" and "only politically educated workers can re-edit the film. And to make it visually acceptable they have to master the technique of montage."[100] The concern for quality *and* political "correctness" is a constant in the debates on cinema that took place throughout the 1920s.[101]

Robespierre and spat in his face, spit that Robespierre whipped off with a handkerchief and the title indicated Robespierre's hatred for Danton that would lead him to the guillotine. In the Russian version released in 1924 under the title *Guillotine*, the scene changed in the following manner: Camille Desmoulins is condemned to the guillotine and Danton rushes to Robespierre, who turns aside and wipes away a tear, with the subtitle indicating how in the name of freedom a friend had to be sacrificed. (Tsivian, *op. cit*, p. 337)

[96] Leyda, *op.cit.*, p. 24; Waugh adds that Eisenstein not only assisted her in the re-editing of this film, he also used to watch Shub while she worked (Waugh, *op.cit.*, p. 26); Malte Hagener mentions it as the classical example of "bolshevikation" of Western films (Hagener, *op.cit.*, p. 169). Tsivian understands this episode of Eisenstein's life as crucial for his development as director, stating that just a month before going into production of *Strike*, Eisenstein found time to spend in Goskino bureau, and not just because he was interested in Lang's filmmaking, but because of the wit of the editotrs in the circle of Moscow cineastes (Tsivian, *op. cit*, p. 336 and 341).

[97] Hagener, *op. cit*., p. 169, Tsivian refers to the film as "The Gilded Rot"; Tsivian, *op. cit.,* p. 336; and Waugh as "the Gilded Mould", Waugh, *op. cit.,* p. 26.

[98] Leyda, *op.cit.*, p. 23

[99] Petric, *op.cit.,* pp. 33-34.

[100] Tsivian (quotes it from *Zrelishcha* (The Spectacle), 1924, nº 77, p. 13), *op. cit.*, p. 333.

[101] As can be read in a statement published in *Pravda* in 1924: "While, in the bourgeois countries of Europe and America, cinema, with its immense technical and artistic resources, serves the ruling classes by distracting the proletariat from revolution and dimming the popular consciousness, in our country." "Declaration of the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 103. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 103.

In 1924 Shub was transferred to the Third Studio of Goskino to advise and cut new films by Russian directors, who by that time had seen the value Shub could contribute to their own productions.[102] Even after achieving this kind of acknowledgement from Soviet directors and Goskino, she still found it difficult to move from editing to directing and helm her own projects.[103] When, in 1926, Shub proposed a project for what would eventually become *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, Trianin and the management of the Third Studio insisted she continue editing fiction films.[104] At that time Shub was seeking in newsreel material a new cinematic way to show the revolutionary past. She was sure she could find enough material to work with, having found lists of newsreels filmed in 1917 and having discovered that the Tsar had maintained a court cameraman.[105] She then turned to Sovkino,[106] where, as Leyda put it, "the livelier minds of Bliakhin and Shklovsky had some say in policy, and after several conferences they said 'Yes'."[107]

[102] Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 24. The Third Studio can aslo be refered to as the Third Workshop (Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 50).
[103] Stollery, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96
[104] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[105] Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 24. According to Graham Roberts, Kurt von Hahn-Jagielski, the Romanov's court photographer made a series of films that were released by Gaumont in the West (parades, troop reviews, the Duma in session and procession of pilgrims). Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[106] Sovkino: acronym for Soviet Cinema organisation, 1924-1930. Established in response to the complaints that seven years after the Revolution there was no such thing as Soviet cinema, in an attempt to replace Goskino and to ennact the Commission's commendation. (Taylor and Christie (eds.) *The Film Factory.* p. 101) Its Establishment Decree is reproduced in Taylor and Christie (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.
[107] Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Pavel Bliakhin, was the head of the literary and artistic section at Sovkino, and he officially gave her the commission (Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 51). Viktor Shklovsky, together with Mayakovsky, would be one of the protagonists of the intense debates concerning cinema in the 1920s, among his claims he defended making available greater resources for documentary film (*The Film Factory*, *op. cit.*, p. 159); he criticizes those who, unlike Shub, "cut up newsreels in order to use bits in their own films" and end up "turning our film libraries into piles of broken film", a clear accusation directed towards Vertov. Shklovsky, Viktor "Where Is Dziga Vertov Striding?". In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 152. He is also critical with the dispersion of film concerning Revolution. Shklovsky, Viktor. "The Temperature of Cinema." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 162-64. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 163.

1.3. WRITING HISTORY WTH IMAGES

> "One could say that Esther Shub was the first Cinematic Historian, in the sense of 'writing history with lighting,' as President Woodrow Wilson said of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*. But While Griffith in his film 'reconstructed' a moment in American history, Shub subsequently 'wrote' the history of the Soviet revolution using the *authentic* images as 'letters' for composing words and sentences while 'typing' them on her editing table. For Esther Shub, Moviola was 'le stylo', her sharp 'writing pen'."[108]
> Vlada Petric

In this section we shall see in detail Shub's notion of historical cinema, how she conceived her theme, the February Revolution, through the images she researched. Her approach is that of a historian in more than one sense, firstly, because of her method: her relentless research, both in archives and in the "field", both of film stock and written documents. It is only after this intense research that she articulates a script, but the real *writing is done with the images*, they are the raw material that builds her film, in the same manner as archaeological finds build a museum display. By doing so she is not only writing history with images but also creating an *image of history*.

Her approach, and her entire notion of what factual film should be, relies on what could be called in Bazinian terms an "ontological" understanding of film documents. There is a belief in their *authenticity*, a belief that they hold objective truths because they are mechanical recordings of the protagonists and events of a recent past that is being recounted. There is a belief in their direct linkage to the events they depict, they are conceived as indexical tracings of those events. Those tracings, those remains directly linked to the events are re-edited/re-written into a new historical discourse, explaining in simple terms an unproblematic view of the history of the February Revolution, one which would later become the "official" discourse of that episode of history.

Her particular position within the Bolshevik Film Industry is also crucial to understanding the attention and high praise she received from her contemporaries, especially the critics from *Lef*, who often would use her as an exemplary filmmaker in contrast to Vertov and Eisenstein, who in the late 1920s were deemed too complex and too formal to serve the revolutionary cause.

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[108] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

1.3.1. SHUB, THE CINEMATIC HISTORIAN

As one might expect of a historian, Shub started her work researching in archives. Sovkino not only gave Shub the green light, she was also assigned a small team to gather the scattered scraps of film, which included M. Tsetlin as consultant and co-author of the titles.[109] Digging up the material was a strenuous task. A large amount of footage had been taken out of the country or destroyed. She visited the archives of Kino-Moskva, Pathé and Gaumont, as well as the Moscow Museum of the Revolution. She travelled from Moscow to Leningrad and Kiev, and she discovered the whereabouts of some of the material sold abroad.[110] During her two months in Leningrad she watched 60,000 metres of footage, from which she selected 5,200 metres to work on in Moscow. When she was not immersed in this "archaeological task" she spent her time familiarizing herself with the streets of Leningrad, in order to get a better knowledge of the shots taken in the city in 1917. She also supervised the filming of documents, newspapers and items associated with the events she was reconstructing.[111] Leyda quotes Shub's account of her experience in Leningrad:

> "At the end of the summer, 1926, I went to Leningrad. It was even harder there. All the valuable negatives and positives of war-time and pre-revolutionary newsreels were kept in a damp cellar on Sergievsky Street. The cans were coated with rust. In many places the dampness had caused the emulsion to come away from the celluloid base. Many shots that appeared on the lists had disappeared altogether.
> Not one metre of negative or positive on the February Revolution had been preserved, and I was even shown a document that declared that no film of that event could be found in Leningrad."[112]

In fact, according to Roberts, no film of the demonstrations of February 26th-28th 1917 was ever shot, since newsreel cameramen did not begin filming until March 1st. The footage that had been shot included images of crowds on the streets of Petrograd and Moscow and the destruction of the symbols of Tsarism. All of the film was given to

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[109] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[110] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
[111] Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Malitsky, Josh. "Esfir Shub and the Film Factory-Archive: Soviet Documentary from 1925-1928." *Screening the Past*, no. 17 (2004). http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr_17/JMfr17a.html.
[112] Quoted in Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

the Skobelev Committee and was compiled into *The Great Days of the Russian Revolution*, by the Union of Patriotic Cinematographers.[113]

This scarcity contrasted with the great amount of material that Shub found concerning the events before the Revolution and during the Great War. Approximately 1,800 newsreel films had been issued in Russia between 1907 and the Great War. And the image of Russia and its history that this footage transmitted was an imperial one. During the war period (1914-1917) the Skobelev Committee was appointed by the Tsar and his military advisers to film and distribute films on war subjects, these would be part of a newsreel entitled *Mirror of War* (*Zerkalo voiny*).[114]

What did come to light were the private "home movies" of the Tsar Nicholas II. Khmelnitsky, an old newsreel worker who had helped Shub restore some of the damaged footage, brought her cans of "counter-revolutionary" film that contained this footage.[115] However, even with this precious addition to the newsreel footage from 1912 to 1917, Shub still needed more material to cover the events she wanted to portray following her historical point of view. In the end, she shot 1,000 of the total 6,000 feet of the film.[116] Shub also persuaded the Government to buy 2,000 feet of negative about the February Revolution, which included, in Shubs words, "material of the imperialist war, of the funeral of victims of the February Revolution, and-six completely unfamiliar shots of Lenin", the latter would be used in her following feature *The Great Road*, which she started working on immediately after the release of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*.[117]

Petric's statement declaring Shub the "first Cinematic Historian" includes two very interesting notions: one, that her method consisted in "writing history with lighting" and, two, that her raw material was made of "*authentic* images". The first notion, that of the analogy of the camera with the pen was addressed by Alexandre Astruc in 1948 in his manifesto "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: Le Camera-

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[113] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
[114] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12 The Skobelev Committee had been the organisation responsable for Russian newsreel production during the First World War. (Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory*, p. 419) But it originally was an organization for helping war veterans. (Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 12)
[115] Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Weinrichter, *Metraje encontrado*, p. 44.
[116] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[117] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 24; Malitsky, *op. cit.*; Leyda gives a more detailed account of this: "A quantity of early reels had been sent to the United States, as thanks for the work of the American Relief Association during the months of famine. This had fallen into private hands, yet Schub traced this footage and arranged through Amtorg (the Soviet trade office in the United States) for its purchase, for $6000."(Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 26).

Stylo".[118] In his text, Astruc defends cinema as language, as a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, he or she can tackle any subject, any genre. In this kind of filmmaking the scriptwriter directs his own scripts, the distinction between author and director loses all meaning, and direction is no longer a means of presenting a scene, but "a true act of writing". The filmmaker writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen. However, Shub did not employ a camera for her "cinematic writing", she used an editing table, but even so the images she used did not merely illustrate a story, they built it, they *were* the story.

This idea of writing *with* the film medium, *through* the medium to articulate her statements is essential. What she was doing with film could only be done with film, it was not a filmic adaptation shot to illustrate a text; she researched the images in order to think out her story and then used them as an alphabet that constructed the story, as the threads that made the fabric, that was the story itself. Shub treated the images she selected as archaeological finds capable of recovering a particular period of history and built with them a specific discourse. She thought these images to be true, authentic and more eloquent than any possible historical recreation played by actors and shot in stages.

These images were significant for Shub because they were what she deemed "*authentic* images", and this notion of authentic images relied on two facts, one, their provenance, that is that they were "factual images", shots of *real* people instead of actors portraying scripted parts in staged scenes; and two, the way they were produced, that is, that they were mechanically shot *during* the occurrence of the events she wants to represent; they were *the recordings of* the events as they were taking place, instead of representations, making them more "real" than any other kind of depiction and far superior to any kind of staged images. In Shub's own words: "It does not worry us in the least whether Rykov or Lenin act well in front of the camera or whether this is a played moment. What is important to us is that the camera has filmed both Lenin and Dybenko."[119] The fact that what matters most to her is that the camera *has filmed* Lenin implies that she believes in the image's indexicality, its direct link to what it depicts, as

[118] Astruc, Alexandre. 1948 "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo" https://soma.sbcc.edu/Users/DaVega/FILMST_113/Filmst113_ExFilm_Theory/CameraStylo_Astruc_1928.pdf (Last accessed June 7th 2015). Original Source: Astruc, Alexandre. "Du Stylo Á La Ugiti Et De La Ugiti Au Stylo." *L'Écran française* (1948).

[119] Shub, Esfir. "We Do Not Deny the Element of Mastery." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 185-87. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988.

if being able to record an image of the event that is taking place is synonymous of producing an objective, impartial and truthful account of what is in action.

1.3.2. INDEXICAL IMAGES OF THE PAST

Her faith in the "objectivity" of images is based on the fact that these images were mechanically produced, since the camera had simply recorded what had been in front of it and, thus, for her was freed from any kind of subjective manipulation. It relates to what years later Bazin called the "ontology of the photographic image", when writing about certain Italian and French films of the 1950s. In Bazin's words, "The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model."[120]

Bazin's ontology, which has been intensely criticized in the last decades, can prove to be productive when approaching Shub's notion of film as document. One of the most interesting ideas in Bazin's writings, as pointed out by Philip Rosen, is that in his ontology "there is not only a history of the image but an image of history."[121] Nowadays to believe that "Film has both documented and constructed our reality,"[122] is a common assumption (at least in film studies and academic circles). Comolli, among others, argues that Bazin "is naïve to think that because the camera records a real event, that 'it provides us with an objective and impartial image of that reality' as 'The *represented* is seen via a *representation* which, necessarily, transforms it."[123] On the other hand, both Andrew and Rosen claim that Bazin could not have been as naïve as to think that it *was the object*, but he did think it was its *real impression*, like a tracing or a imprint of the object, this proximity to the existence of the object, this direct link, gave

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[120] Bazin, André. "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1960 1960): 4-9, p. 8.
[121] Rosen, Philip. "History of Image, Image of History. Subject and Ontology in Bazin." In *Rites of Realism. Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, edited by Ivone Margulies, 42-79. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, p. 73.
[122] Basilico, Stefano. "The Editor." In *Cut. Film as Found Object in Contemporary Video*, edited by Stefano Basilico, 29-45. Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 2004, p. 29.
[123] Quoted in Bruzzi, Stella. *New Documentary*. Second ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 16.

great value to its record. The fact that Bazin compares cinema to indexical significations such as fingerprints or death masks is significant; the referent of these examples were present in the past, which implies that apprehending a photographic or filmic image as such involves a temporal dimension and the subject must read a past in the image. Much is expected of the spectator, or more specifically a very precise requirement is asked of the spectator. The temporality gap, the different *when* from that of the spectator, cannot be immediately present, it must be *inferred* by the subject. Bazin must assume that the special credibility of these images is based on a prior knowledge on part of the subject of how these images are produced. That production is apprehended as coming from the past, and it is precisely temporality that is crucial for the subject predisposed to invest belief in such an image.[124] It is also important to add that Bazin believed that cinema was the art of the real, not only because of how we perceived space, it was not only about a physical realism, more importantly, the thought that the realism in cinema was based on a psychological notion. The idea was that we viewed cinema as we view reality not because of the way it looks, but because of the way it was recorded. Hence, realism did not have to do with the accuracy of reproduction, or not only with the accuracy, but with the spectator's belief about the origin of the reproduction.[125]

Another crucial factor for truth claims linked to photographic (and filmic) images is the importance of verisimilitude; since reality is coded, it is read through conventionally understood signs, and the recognition of this code these signs is of the highest importance.[126] However, as Tom Gunning points out, the indexical quality of a photograph must not be confused with its iconicity.[127] Our evaluation of a photograph as accurate depends not only on its indexical bases (its mechanical trace, its physical impression), but also on our recognition of it looking like its subject (psychological and perceptual processes). The image must also be legible.[128] Photography's claim to truth also implies the possibility of telling a lie, the apparatus itself cannot lie or tell the truth, it is people who say things about it.[129] Gunning also acknowledges that a photograph

[124] Philip Rosen, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51; and Andrew, J. Dudley. *The Film Theories. An Introduction*. London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 140.
[125] Dudley, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
[126] Cowie, Elizabeth. "The Spectacle of Actuality." In *Collecting Visible Evidence*, edited by Jane Gaines and Michael Renov, 19-45. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 30.
[127] Gunning, Tom. "What's the Point of an Index? Or Faking Photographs." *NORDICOM Review* 1, no. 2, Special Issue: The 16th Nordic Conference on Media and Communication Research (2004): 39-49, p. 40.
[128] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[129] *Ibid*, p. 42.

also puts us in the presence of something, for Barthes it was the presenting of a past time.

Bazin displaces the consideration of the special appeal of cinematic "referentiality" from spatial similarity to temporal issues.[130] However, it might be important to mention that the entire operation takes place starting with the likeness through perspective (as a necessary means in the development of the mechanically produced images), which initially provides a sort of credible code whose credibility can then be lent to automatically produced images. But, then an inversion occurs, and it is the *mechanical* process that ends up lending its credibility to the spatial configuration or the image.[131] We believe the truth claims attached to the image because it was mechanically recorded. In Barthes terms, every photograph is co-natural with its referent; the photographic referent was "the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph."[132]

For Wollen this view of the image answers to the description of an indexical sign, i.e it attests to the existence of something, what Barthes calls "the thing that has been there." It has been there and yet it is immediately separated, it has been present and deferred.[133] Since what is indexical holds some sort of connection between a referent and the signifier, the latter can provide an irrefutable testimony to the subject as to the real existence of the referent. [134]

It might be useful to introduce certain notions reflected on by Roland Barthes, who thought that in photography our consciousness took the path of certainty, since "the photography's essence is to ratify what it represents."[135] For Barthes this certainty is unattainable for other means of expression such as writing and does not translate to cinema. He does believe that cinema has a photographic referent, but this referent shifts; in his view, cinema does not make a claim for or in favour of its reality, since "Like the real world, the filmic world is sustained by the presumption that, as Husserl says, 'the experience will constantly continue to flow by in the same constitutive style'; but the Photograph breaks the 'constitutive styles." [136] However, Barthes's thoughts on photography could apply to Shub's work with "factual images", on the one hand, in the

[130] Rosen, *op. cit.* p. 47.
[131] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[132] Barthes, Roland *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982, p. 76
[133] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[134] Rosen, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.
[135] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 85.
[136] *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

sense that they can be seen as performing an operation of ratification; and, on the other, because they perform, if not an act of arrest, an act of re-view, a looking back, which is an interruption of sorts. The notions of flow and arrest will be dealt with later in the chapter, specifically in relation to ideas of Walter Benjamin and Mary Ann Doane.

Now might be a good time to see in some detail what Barthes is pointing at. First, it is also necessary to specify that Bazin is writing about fiction, realistically depicted, but fiction nonetheless. What happens when we apply his idea to nonfiction works such as Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*. It is in this respect that it might be helpful to bear in mind some of Barthes ideas on the "press photograph."[137] For Barthes, the press photograph is a message, with a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception.[138] The photograph transmits, by definition, the scene, the reality; from the object to its image there is a reduction, it is not the reality but it is its *analogon*.[139] A photograph, as all imitative arts, holds two messages: a *denoted* message (the *analogon* itself) and a *connoted* message, which is the manner in which the society communicates what it thinks of it.[140] This connotation can be inferred from what occurs at the levels of the production and reception of the image; on one hand, it has been worked on, chosen, constructed, treated according to certain norms; on the other hand, it is *read*, it is connected by the public to a traditional stock of signs.[141]

Shub's understanding of archival film stock is one that places a very high value on the denoted message and paradoxically blindsides the "original" connoted message, by elaborating on this connoted aspect of the images. Her subversion is one of connotation through the *analagon*. Thus, paradoxically she turns the "original" connotations on their heads in order to show what she believes to be "the truth" in these images, which (apparently) remain unaltered. Her alteration is a highly effective one, since she applies what she considers a "truer", new reading to *real* images, *authentic* images (that seemingly are the same). Their authenticity relies on the fact that they were the mechanical capture of one aspect, or one side, or one fragment of an event that took

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[137] Shub's raw material, mainly newsreel, comes from the imagery of press. The relationship between Russian cinema in the 1920s and the bolshevik press is quite remarkable and it shall be expanded on furhter on. In any case, I do not intend to state that factual cinema and press photograph should be considered the same thing, but what Barthes discusses in "The Photographic Message" is helpful in the analysis of Shub's original material and in the analysis of how she subverts it. Barthes, Roland "The Photographic Message." In *Image Music Text*, 15-31. London: Fontana Press, 1977, p. 15

[138] *Ibid.*

[139] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[140] *Ibid.*

[141] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

place. In her film they seem unaltered, but their re-consignation and re-connotation makes them completely different, while remaining apparently the same.

What is more, she reaffirms what she believes is her objectiveness, her lack of manipulation of the images, by placing herself a step further from it, in Yampolsky's terms she is working with "reality at second hand."[142] So Shub not only uses film that is mechanically (thus, in her view objectively) recorded, she uses shots that are not even hers, which in her mind emphasizes her "objective" position. As Yampolsky pointed out, it is as if by working on old newsreels Shub "was beyond suspicion", in contrast to Vertov who was being accused in the mid 1920s of betraying the document and moving away from reality. To her contemporaries, work on film archival material seemed to be a guaranty of greater documentary authenticity than work on the real life surrounding filmmakers (as Vertov and the Cine-Eyes did).[143] The use of film shot by others was a way of setting a distance, which had two effects: first, it supposedly purged the subjectivity from those shots and, second, the film as document was being identified with reality. So the director-editor's view of "second-hand" images substitutes the view of the director-editor herself on reality. Leading to the consideration of the film archive as an "analogue of reality."[144] The concept of history inherent in Shub's films implies the idea of the archive as the bearer of history; the stored material provided an *unauthored* (hence, for her, non-manipulated) view of the past, by alienating the document from the director it *became* a document of the past.[145]

Another important issue to factor in when talking about Bazin's reflections on photographic ontology, is that he is considered a "realist theorist" and the first critic to effectively challenge the formative tradition based on montage, of which Eisenstein was the maximum exponent. Bazin claimed for a film tradition "based on a belief in the naked power of the mechanically recorded image rather than on the learned power of artistic control over such images."[146] This posture is usually confronted to Eisenstein, but one must assume that it stands counter Shub as well. Weinrichter points out compilation's curious positioning since the use of montage is usually posited against

[142] Yampolsky, Mikhail. "Reality at Second Hand." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* 11 no. 2 (June 1991 1991): 161-71.
[143] *Ibid.*
[144] *Ibid.*
[145] Hagener, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.
[146] Andrew, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

Bazin's ontology of the documentary image, because it would attempt against its objective and evidentiary vocation. This very fact, according to Weinrichter, is the reason why compilation film has long been exiled from by the documentary institution.[147]

In any case, Shub demonstrates to be very hard to classify as a filmmaker. In her work we see both a belief in the indexicality of the filmic image, in its "legitimate" claim to truth because of its mechanical origin, and a sophisticated use of montage, more specifically her personal adaptation of Eseinstein's "montage of attractions", even if it was in a toned down and more subtle manner.

1.3.3. THE PAST AS (A FLEETING) IMAGE

As has been extensively discussed, the sense and representation of history have suffered intense transformations since the beginning of the twentieth century and, not coincidentally, these transformations are "correlative with the birth of cinema, modernity, and 'modernism'."[148] As stated in the section above, when the represented is seen through its representation, the latter necessarily transforms the former. Technologies of representation play an essential part in the shaping of "events", and novel technologies of representation have transformed these "events" by granting them unprecedented visibility;[149] one of the first of such technologies was cinema. One keen observer of the transformations taking place was Walter Benjamin, whose "Theses of the Philosophy of History" presents a new concept of history and of present, as well as a new relation between them. One of the points he states early on is that "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."[150] However insightful this notion of the past as a something that flits by, it seems uncannily cinematic, those images made of shadows and lights that only thanks to the effect of the afterimages in our brain compose cinema.

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[147] Weinrichter, *Metraje encontrado*, p. 36. Further in the thesis I will extend on the notion of compilation and other terms used to frame *The Fall* in a genre within non fiction cinema.
[148] Sobchack, Vivian. "History Happens." In *The Persistence of History. Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, edited by Vivian Sobchack, 1-14. New York and London: Routledge, 1996, p. 7.
[149] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[150] Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 253-64. New York: Schocken Books, 1988, p. 255.

This idea of a "picture that flits by" and "the past as an image which flashes up" and "is never seen again" could be linked to the movement capture studies made by Muybridge and Marey, what many see as an antecedent of cinema itself. This idea of not being able to see more than a mere flash, a shadow, a glimpse of something evanescent, fleeting, which we cannot fully remember must have been at the heart of these investigations. It must have motivated Muybrudge and Marey in their insistence in breaking up movement, of capturing it, showing what the eye cannot see on its own. Benjamin's notion of history, one that flashes up and disappears, barely viewable, ungraspable in its motion, also breaks up a continuum, in a certain sense. He opposes historicism, source of Universal History, which is additive, which fills a homogeneous, empty time to materialistic historiography, which he deems constructive, and involves the flow of thoughts and their arrest as well. In Benjamin's own words "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now."[151] And what is more, "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger", that danger would be "the threat of becoming a tool for the ruling classes."[152] This idea of history as articulation, as flow *and* arrest of thought came about in a time when the flow and arrest of movement could be recorded, projected and repeated by means of technology. As Kittler states, "the making of films is in principle nothing but cutting and splicing: the copping up of continuous motion, or history, before the lens".[153]

Not only *could* events be recorded, edited and screened, events *were* becoming defined by their recordability, edition and screening. Benjamin was signalling the fact that technology was defining (or redefining) culture; it was influencing the shape of things to come. The way things could be *seen* (physically and metaphorically) and, consequently, the way things could be thought was undergoing a profound transformation. Just as film is made of still images that our eyes see in continuous motion,[154] history had been based on this idea of homogeneous, empty time. However, as Kittler reminds us, cinema remains "shadowy, fleeting."[155]

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[151] *Ibid.*, p. 261.
[152] *Ibid.*, p. 255.
[153] Kittler, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
[154] The eye sees seamless motion rather thatn 24 single and still shots. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
[155] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

Film is a recording and recorded media, but one that is in motion - leaving aside VHS and digital mediums - cinema in Shub's time, and in Benjamin's, could not be consulted as one consults a book. Not only did one need certain screening devices (even if it were just a moviola), but also one needed access to the rolls of film. Which further clarifies what a great achievement it was that Shub gained access and permission to research and use historical reels of film. True much of it had been deemed *waste* due to its counter-revolutionary content; nonetheless she had been trusted to build a historical account of the revolutionary past with her finds. Not a minor task by any account.

Shub had been granted the privilege to research the archives, and she even was able to persuade the government to acquire more material for the archive and, even more importantly, she was allowed to interpret this archive. She was ordering the recent past, putting it into sequence, stating were the Bolshevik history started, and showing how it was to be represented with the use of *filmic documents*. As Derrida has argued, the access and the authority to interpret a community's archive is no minor matter, it is a privilege; the archive bears with it the power of unification, identification, classification, and consignation.[156]

Shub was articulating a film on the February Revolution using as source film stock covering the events prior to the Revolution, which included scenes that belonged to newsreels that ennobled the Tsar's Regime, scenes that represented a seemingly powerful armament industry and navy, domestic scenes shot in the home of local rulers and leisure images of the court. What could be revolutionary about those sequences? Could Shub be "brushing" those scenes "against" the grain? None of these sequences were revolutionary per se, or even unflattering to the ruling classes and old regime per se. However, Shub subjected these images to her "revolutionary view", what once had seemed harmless or even pride worthy now was being used to show decadence, backwardness, an oppressing past that, as one would read from the film, was coming to a violent and logical conclusion. In Keattie's eloquent words, "(s)howing and editing the images in another manner, contextualizing the images with shots of peasants, intertitles and cuts, Shub makes apparent the dynasty's *irreality*, its separation from the world it was supposed to govern. In using the images Esfir Shub destroys the power of the dynasty by the very images by which that power attributed itself. The displacement

[156] Derrida, Jacques. *Mal De Archivo. Una Impresión Freudiana*. Madrid: Trotta, 1996, p. 11.

of the questioning by the addition of an exteriorization which violently disrupts the ordered image."[157]

What relationship can we establish between Shub and the ideal Historical Materialist claimed by Benjamin, who would brush history against the grain? In a certain sense, Shub could be seen as the "historical materialist" who "regards it as his [her] task to brush the history against the grain" that Benjamin claims for.[158] Where others see useless, obsolete imperialistic footage, Shub sees historical documents of great value, which she decides to approach in an inquisitive manner. She uses the very images of the old order to question it; she brings out new, opposed meanings to the initial sense of the footage. This is what makes Shub's film so interesting and revolutionary, in the sense that she is contributing a new approach to cinematic documents, unveiling their potentiality, their polysemy, the great plasticity cinema holds. However, Shub's analytical scrutiny had only one purpose, to show the "brilliance" of the Bolshevik Revolution. Her scrutiny is absolutely biased; her skill is put to the service of an ideology above anything else. She does not subject the Bolsheviks, or the Revolution to any scrutiny at all. She only questions one thing: the Tsar and his regime. The portrayal of the Bolshevik revolution is almost as if it were an organic, natural, unavoidable and logical event. It is shown as the conclusion to an accumulating history, of a straight line of "progress".

1.3.4. ALL A MATTER OF MONTAGE

> "One 'obvious' but crucial fact: all film sequences have been selections."[159]
> Kittler

> "Since celluloid strips can be cut and joined at any point, a film-maker can assume complete control over those elements of time and space which are reproduced more or less automatically in the images. He can unite events which are far apart or dissect those which are continuous." V.F. Perkins[160]

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[157] Beauvais, Yann. "Lost and Found." In *Found Footage Film*, edited by Cecilia Hausheer and Christoph Settele, 9-26. Freiburg: VIPER, 1992, pp. 11-13.
[158] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", p. 257.
[159] Kittler, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
[160] Perkins, V.F. *Film as Film. Understanding and Judging Movies*. London: Da Capo Press, 1993, pp. 19-20.

In the 1920s in Soviet Russia, nearly all questions pertaining to cinema were framed as questions of editing.[161] During this period film was intensely theorized by the likes of Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov and Eisenstein, as well as Shub. The Civil War newsreel filmmaking experience had a crucial effect on the aesthetic of Soviet films of the 1920s. Kuleshov was the first professional filmmaker to support the Revolution. He was working for the Moscow Cinema Committee when they started producing the first post-revolution newsreel, a weekly production titled *Cine-Week*; it was direct in style, and its technique of filming was straightforward, it portrayed the Soviet institutions and the Bolshevik party as a "permanent fixture and as an agent for change in the new order."[162] Film production during the Civil War (1918-1921) was characterized by shortage, film, stock, equipment, electricity, technicians and, above all, money were scarce. Resulting in productions that were brief, economic in style and simple in content.[163]

Lev Kuleshov is perhaps the first theorist of editing, before him most theoretical concerns regarding cinema approached the subject of film as it related to theatre. In a text he published in 1917 the importance he gave to editing as a means of communicating in cinema was already perceptible, in this text, when addressing what he considered the essence of cinema he argued "To make a picture the director must compose the separate filmed fragments, disordered and disjointed, into a single whole and juxtapose these separate moments into a more advantageous, integral and rhythmical sequence."[164] In 1918 he went further, stating "Montage is to cinema what colour composition is to painting."[165] In 1920 he would establish his workshop and his famous experiments would demonstrate that the meaning of a shot was not inherent in that shot, but that it stemmed from its juxtaposition with other shots. He would influence filmmakers such as Pudovkin and Eisenstein, who would further develop and use his principles.[166] According to the former, Kuleshov "maintained that the film-art

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[161] Andrew, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[162] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[163] Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory*, p. 22.
[164] Kuleshov, Lev. "The Tasks of the Artist in Cinema." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 41-43. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 41.
[165] Kuleshov, Lev. "The Art of Cinema." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 45-46. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 46.
[166] Sobchack, Thomas and Sobchack, Vivian C. *An Introduction to Film*. Second ed. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown & Company, 1987, p. 106.

does not begin when the artists act and the various scenes are shot – this is only the preparation of the material. Film-art begins from the moment when the director begins to combine and join the various pieces of film."[167] Pudovkin insisted that creative filmmaking came from the proper choice and organization of these "bits of reality", which already have a "definitive power". Pudovkin believed in linking shots to guide the spectator to the acceptance of an event or story.[168] In other words, he believed that shots were like building blocks and that meaning resided in an accumulation of details that naturally arose out of the story.[169]

Eisenstein was also influenced by Kuleshov, having attended his workshop, as many of the most important Soviet directors of the avant-garde.[170] However, he distanced himself from the latter in the sense that he demanded collision instead of linkage, as well as an audience of co-creators.[171] Unlike Kuleshov and Pudovkin, he did not believe that narrative images were only building blocks or that their juxtaposition necessarily had a cumulative effect. For Eisenstein meaning was created not through an accumulation of separate images, but from the clash or attraction between images.[172] Eisenstein's influences were varied, and came from the theatre world, he had joined Meyerhold's theatre school, which would determine his treatment of masses in history films as well as a stylized approach, which made his films explicitly didactic and expository, in contrast to Kuleshov's intention to affect the emotions subliminally.[173] Some authors argue that these characteristics we see in Eisenstein's films influenced Shub, but it is also possible that both directors had a common influence: Meyerhold, since Shub had worked for him before entering Goskino and it was there that she met Eisenstein.

But Eisenstein influences also included Kabuki theatre and other oriental art forms, which lead him to see images more like Chinese or Japanese ideograms. He argued that two images, unlike in content, could be juxtaposed to create a new idea in the mind of the viewer, and this collision of unrelated images is what he called "intellectual montage" and has also came to be known as "montage of attractions".[174]

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[167] Quoted in Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[168] Andrew, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
[169] Sobchack and Sobchack, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
[170] Figes, Orlando. *Natasha's Dance. A Cultural History of Russia*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002, p. 455.
[171] Andrew, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
[172] Sobchack and Sobchack, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.
[173] Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, p. 458.
[174] Sobchack and Sobchack, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

What Eisenstein's notion of montage implied was that the specific interaction of shots was what produced meaning, for him "montage is the life of principle which gives meaning to raw shots."[175] He could not accept the notion of the shot as a bit of reality that the filmmaker gathers, as opposed to Vertov and Shub. He believed a creative filmmaker constructs his own sense out of this raw material, he builds relations that are not implicit in the shot, he creates rather than directs meaning.[176] Eisenstein's concept of montage was indebted to the constructivist aesthetics, the theories of dialectical thinking and certain psychological theories of the 1920 such as those defended by Pavlov, the Associationists and especially Piaget.[177] The constructivist idea of art as a machine, as a construction designed with specific goals, this machine's construction and functioning is largely predictable. The spectator must recreate the story of the film by resolving the tensions with which he is confronted. Eisenstein believed that the mind worked dialectically by making synthesis between opposing elements and that the crowning moment of a film comes when the mind synthesizes the opposing ideas which give a film its energy.[178]

Dziga Vertov was also influenced by Kuleshov. He had worked with him during the Civil War, when he was employed to select the material for *Cine Week*, and shortly after he would take sole charge of the selection/compilation duties.[179] *Cine Week* folded in July 1919 and Vertov ventured out on his own documentary projects. He also participated in mobile filming and screening trips on agitprop trains since their very beginning, and when he found himself unable to obtain fresh footage, Vertov re-edited earlier *Cine Week* newsreels into historical compilations. Together with his wife, Elizaveta Svilova, and his brother, Mikhail Kaufman, he embarked on a more ambitious newsreel: *Cine-Pravda*.[180] They dubbed themselves "The Council of Three" or *Kinoki* (the Cine-Eyes) and published their first manifesto in 1922.[181] Where they expressed their disdain for what they called "cinematographers", understanding "cinematography" as the current and undesirable state of affairs, and favoured "cinema", which they

[175] Andrew, *op. cit.*, p. 52-53.
[176] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[177] *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.
[178] *Ibid.*, p. 60-62.
[179] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
[180] Hicks, Jeremy. *Dziga Vertov. Defining Documentary Film*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007, p. 6.
[181] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 22; and Taylor and Christie, *Film Factory*, p. 54.

described as a pure, precise and perfect future form for moving pictures.[182] Their project was political and modernist, and it involved a questioning attitude to reality and realism, as well as an undivided worship of modernisation and urban life.[183] Their productions were uncompromisingly pro-Soviet in their message, but their experimental nature and visual complexity prevented them from being popular with the public and made them the target of the critics. The Cine-Eyes proclaimed the virtues of documentary and, in their eyes, cinema was to be a science based art form, derived from technology. In their own words "WE are purging the Cine-Eye of its hangers-on, of music, literature and theatre, we are seeking our own rhythm, one that has not been stolen from elsewhere, and we are finding it in the movement of objects."[184]

1.3.5. SHUB, THE SKILLED *MONTAGEUSE*

> "It is the work of an experienced and highly skilled *montageuse*." Graham Roberts[185]

> "It is quite amazing how many unexpected solutions come up when you hold film stock in your hands. Just like letters – they are born form the tip of the pen--." Esfir Shub[186]

Shub was part of the intellectual and avant-garde circles of her time. She was Vertov's and Eisenstein's peer. She influenced and was herself influenced by the latter; and she shared many concerns with the former, such as those regarding the problem of structuring newsreel material and a regard for documentary as morally superior to fiction filmmaking. She created cinematic collages of past events seen from a contemporary standpoint, and proved that cinema offered an ideal possibility for historical discourse.[187]

She has in common with Einsenstein his editing technique, in which dissimilar images are juxtaposed to produce new, unanticipated, unsuspected meanings (montage of collision), and his belief that the most crucial task of filmmaking was the discovery

[182] Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory*, p. 54.
[183] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
[184] Vertov, Dziga. "We. A Version of a Manifesto." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 69-72. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 69.
[185] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[186] Shub quoted in Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
[187] *Ibid.*, p. 37-38.

of the theme. For Shub there is no such thing as bare reality directly apprehensible, the filmmaker's task is to apprehend the *true* form of an event and then utilize that form in the construction of the artwork.[188] In this sense Shub argued: "In the montage I tried to avoid looking at the newsreel material for its own sake, and to maintain the principle of its documentary quality. All was subordinated to the theme. This gave me the possibility, in spite of the known limitations of the photographed events and facts, to link the meanings of the material so that it evoked the pre-revolutionary period and the February days."[189]

Her relationship with Eisenstein was that of close friends and of mutual respect and admiration as peers. He would, according to Shub's own account, "come to my editing room, not once, but many times, particularly when I was looking over the old footage about the February events in Leningrad and Moscow, and I think that he reconstructed the July revolt in Leningrad (*October*) directly under the impression of what he saw while viewing the old footage with me."[190] And, in late 1927, she visited Leningrad, observing Eisenstein's shooting of *October* and discussing the montage structure of specific sequences with him and his assistant Alexandrov.[191] The directors would maintain a lengthy correspondence and a lifelong friendship, but she never rejected her own approach to cinema, which was determined by her great concern for *ontological authenticity*, which was one of the points in common she shared with Dziga Vertov.

Her relationship with Vertov was less cordial and more controversial. She described herself as his pupil and, according to Petric, Vertov considered Shub one of the most significant figures in Soviet documentary film of the silent era.[192] The *Kinoki* believed that fiction cinema was a bourgeois art form and should be abandoned for a cinema of facts, made up of factual footage, of real people instead of actors in staged scenarios. Shub concurred, but the Cine-Eyes deemed Shub's work not radical enough, due to the fact that the plot in her film was connected, that she presented an accessible story that developed gradually and, in their eyes, this made them see her work closer to Pudovkin's. They argued that when working with documentary material one shouldn't follow a standard narrative. What is more, Mikhail Kaufman - the cameraman in *Man*

[188] Andrew, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[189] Shub quoted in Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, p. 25.
[190] Petric, *op. cit.,* p. 29.
[191] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[192] *Ibid.*, p. 29

with Movie Camera and Vertov's brother – mentions that Vertov described Shub's method of using footage in *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* with revulsion. However, Kaufman defends it from the point of view of historical context, finding it "extremely interesting, even if in terms of interpretation, the way in which images and emotions are presented, it leaves a great deal to be desired."[193]

It might be tempting to assume that Shub simply melded Eisenstein montage technique with Vertov's use of factual footage; however, her work goes beyond mere imitation. In *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* she managed to build on all the great achievements of the best Soviet avant-garde filmmakers; at times, the film works by linkage and accumulation (Pudovkin), there is also collision through juxtaposition (Eisenstein), and a historical approach through the compilation of factual footage (Cine-Eyes). However, her style is unique; her montage is quite sober and simple when compared to the works of Eisenstein and the Cine-Eyes. This does not mean it is less brilliant, for her simplicity is highly effective and does not lack intelligence or wit. One could say her montage is "cleaner", clearer, even more prosaic, but it is not devoid of "trickery", this prosaicness is quite sophisticated. It is thoroughly thought through, she elaborated extensively on the problem of structuring the newsreel material, on how to arrange the footage so that her message is clear and expressive.[194] As a result her message is easily understood and her film is highly effective and affective.

She often repeats the same formulation: she presents a title and then the material in juxtaposition, often in *ironic juxtaposition*.[195] Some of the most striking uses of this type of quick montage have been mentioned above: the scene of the ladies sweating from dancing followed by the workers in the field sweeping their brow, or the contrast between those who wanted war and those who actually fought it. Shub described it as "ideological montage", this reassembling of sequences in a way that "counter-revolutionary material" was transformed into revolutionary statement.[196] This associative concept of montage had the intention of commenting upon events by the very juxtaposition of shots, which seem to "preserve their own authenticity".[197] The

[193] "A Kinok Speaks. Interview with Mikhail Kaufman." In *Imagining Reality. The Faber Book of Documentary*, edited by Mark Cousins and Kevin Macdonald, 65-69. London: Faber and Faber, 2006.
[194] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 25
[195] This operation is repeated throughout the entire film, in Roberts words it is a "set pattern". Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
[196] Attwood, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[197] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

very notion of "authenticity" when referred to an image is an elusive one, images seldom appear isolated, they are usually accompanied by a caption or by other images. The images in a film are not "naked", "untouched", their very selection and articulation within a chain of images inevitably taints them. Beauvais terms this a "materialistic approach", an approach that manipulates collected images to make new ones, shaping new ways of seeing.[198] Shub is writing a commentary on images *with* the images themselves.

The editing pace changes throughout the film: at the beginning the shots are chronologically organised and intercut by informative titles. When she moves to the First World War the editing becomes more dynamic, with many details, the intertitles are more emphatic and emotional. Her main concern seems to be achieving a balance between the material showing the Tsar, his family and Russian politicians of the period, and the images of people, peasants, workers, and ordinary citizens. She emphasized mass movement, which can be read as the symbolic forecast of the events to come. Near the end we see many long shots of demonstrations in Petrograd and Moscow in 1917 to give a feeling of atmosphere and environment.[199]

Some lengthy shots contrast with her ironic montage, such as the celebrations of the Romanovs Anniversary, and the reception of the international leaders; but they are just as strategic. She gives time to see in detail the exuberance and pomp of the Tsar and the "capitalist" leaders of Europe, those who would ultimately lead the world into war as if they were playing with tin soldiers. Another extended moment is the presentation of weapons, their creation in factories and their accumulation in armouries, ports. Also with the funerals of those who died fighting for freedom, as well as the devastation of the war we see long streams of text that contrast with the numerous and short sequences of images of the beginning. All this adds to a sense of weight, of accumulation, of exhaustion.

The implications of social injustice are quite obvious, both with the ironic juxtaposition of scenes as well as with the lengthy sequences of wealth or of the preparations for war. As Bruzzi argues, Shub's method is not to disappear the material's origins, but rather "to preserve that meaning whilst simultaneously imposing a fresh interpretative framework." Bruzzi relates this to Hayden White's dwelling on the idea

[198] Beauvais frames this within the field of reappropriation, he uses this term in relation to filmmakers such as Len Lye, Cécile Fontaine, Carolina Avery. (Beauvais, *op.cit.*).
[199] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

that it is narrative that gives the real historical event cogency, which defends that it is only through the presence of a story that the inherent meaning of events can be revealed or understood and that, in White's own words "To be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening. It receives its definition from its contribution to the development of a plot."[200] Conversely, according to Stella Bruzzi, Shub demonstrates that a fruitful dialogue is possible between original newsreel, home movie footage and the like and the critical eye of the filmmaker, as well as the implied new audience.[201]

1.3.6. UNPLAYED FILMS AND HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION

No matter how diverse the origin of all the footage Shub uses, for the most part, it is factual footage, be it from newsreel or "domestic films". This is not a minor factor and begs some considerations regarding questions related to non-fiction filmmaking and documentary. For this purpose, this section will take a detour into Vertov and his approach to documentary filmmaking, since he was more vocal about his position, which in many respects concurred with Shub, and in others was strongly opposed. It will give a better context to Shub's work as a nonfiction filmmaker, as well as to certain assumptions on the nature of documentary that still remain relevant and that are central to some of the concerns of this thesis.

As is probably clear by now, the Soviet avant-garde cinema was never a unified movement, it was made up of a constellation of film directors and theorists, which maintained very particular and contrasting positions regarding certain concerns central to film production. One of those concerns, montage, has been dealt with at length above, now it is time to turn to another fertile field of debate within the theoretical discussions regarding Soviet film production: the opposition between "played" and "unplayed" films. It is important to see in detail how the division between fiction and nonfiction related to different approaches regarding how historical narratives should be construed. It has become quite common among film scholars to point out how in post-revolutionary Russia the fiction and nonfiction divide was not so clear, that there existed a blurring between presentation in Soviet "played" and "unplayed" films of the

[200] Quoted in Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, p. 28
[201] *Ibid*.

first two Five Year Plans.[202] What is even more fascinating is that this "blurred boundary" was not a static one, nor did it correspond to a consensus. It shifted several times and among different filmmakers and critics in the years surrounding the production and release of Shub's historical trilogy (1927-1928) – of which *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* was the first instalment. Shub's films, specifically the first two, played an important role not only in the evolution of the fiction/nonfiction divide, but also in the evolution of the aesthetics of the Soviet cinema. Several authors defend that Esfir Shub, as well as her contemporaries, did not consider the fact/fiction divide between her portrayal of the recent historical events and films such as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*.[203] But this blurring can be traced back in time to other storytelling mediums. According to Andrew Wachtel, during the 19th century the West saw a division in historical writing between trained historians and writers of fiction, whereas Russia maintained no such division. He argues that Russian writers never allowed themselves to be marginalized from the scene of history writing, they continued to produce works devoted to Russian history in both fictional and historical genres. This led to a situation in which "various genres, each possessing its own authoritative viewpoint could, through their interaction, dialogize the presentation of historical material."[204]

The relationship between played and unplayed films was a main area of interest in the debates of the time. These debates, for the most part, took place in the cinema press, which grew exponentially in the 1920s. But the blurred representation of played and unplayed films of the 1920s would have profound ramifications into the 1930s and beyond. Roberts goes as far as to argue that "the developments of the 1920s led directly to the travesties of unplayed film that purported to portray the Soviet Union which they helped create in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s."[205] Which is an important reminder to be careful with the assumed opposition between the "free 1920s" and the "shackled 1930s"[206] The two are not so opposed, one stems from the other, and their view as opposing or antagonistic is more an inheritance of a certain tradition within academic studies on Soviet filmmaking, which has since become debatable.

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[202] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[203] Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[204] Wachtel, Andrew, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 17. Quoted in Malitsky, *op. cit*.
[205] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[206] Taylor and Christie, *Film Factory*, p. 3.

In what follows, I will elaborate on the difficulty of categorizing Shub's film, reflecting on the implications of using terms such as "documentary" or "nonfiction" to her work. In this sense, it might be helpful to start with a brief overview of the different terms used at the time for what we might now call documentary or nonfiction cinema, since they are quite revealing of the different approximations to cinema's role in the representation of history at the time. In later sections of this chapter, we will relate these discussions with the "film-archive" that nonfiction filmmakers claimed for, comparing the contrasting aspirations of Vertov and Shub, as well as to what Hagener has called "heritage films", suited to fulfil the task of civilizing a new citizenship.[207] This is not a minor issue, since nonfiction plays a central role in understanding how the regime wished to be represented. It is also important to note that audiences were far more likely to have seen documentary shorts than masterpieces by Eisenstein.[208] It would not be long before discussions concerning the content and form of cinema would centre on questions such as the "acted" or "non-acted" film.[209]

Some authors, such as Hagener, have called into question the accurateness of speaking of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* as a documentary, concluding that it responds to retrospective reasoning. However, others, such as Malitsky, defend that the critics and filmmakers of the time are in fact theorizing about documentary in the sense that they "were concerned with feature-length films constructed from previously-gathered material – films capable of making an argument about the historical world for an imagined future audience."[210]

The issue of a specific term for certain film productions, namely those that dealt with the recent history of Russia in a factual manner and with factual images, lead to incendiary debates during the 1920s, which seemed to reach a peak of intensity in 1927 (specially within the pages of the last issue of 1927 of *Novyi Lef*). The most common term at the time for films such as *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* was "*neigrovaia fil'ma*", which translates as unplayed film; according to Roberts it is the contemporary Soviet term for nonfiction film.[211] Another very common term was "*khronika*", the Russian word for newsreel, which was applied to all films of record in the 1920s.

[207] My consideration of Soviet historical films as a civilizing ritual is indebted to Carol Duncan's discussion of the French revolutionaries re-interpretation of the Louvre as a civilizing ritual. Duncan, Carol. *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.
[208] Roberts, *op. cit.*,pp. 1-2.
[209] Hagener, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
[210] *Ibid.*; Malitsky.
[211] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

According to Hicks, it was a restrictive term, in the sense that it was generally applied to a jumble of events given sense by their chronological sequence alone. Which could, in part, explain some of the criticism towards Vertov's productions, since he soon left dates and chronological order aside.[212] Shub's first films, on the other hand, could neatly fall into such a category.

However, Vertov developed his own terminology - one that Shub did not align herself with - to speak of unmediated, unstaged reality. Vertov wrote of "*zhizn' vrasplokh*", which can be translated as "life caught unawares" or as "life off guard."[213] However, it is important to point out that Vertov is not exempt from interfering, provoking or creating certain situations for their filming. Vertov does employ reconstruction, albeit not with professional actors, what he does is reduce the role of the performance to a minimum and work without using a script. The total absence of performance should be understood as an ideal towards which Vertov strove, but which he was never quite able to attain. Which explains Tretyakov's, Vertov's contemporary, claim that the distinction between "played" and "unplayed" film is relative and few documentaries succeeded in employing solely "off-guard" material.[214] Sergei Tretyakov defended that the played/non-played controversy was based on an oversimplification and the real issue for him was that the contrast between fact and fiction was "a question of the degree of deformation of the material out of which the film is composed," thus, the distinction lay in the method of organising the material. He suggested a division between narrative and non-narrative material.[215]

Other terms that were taken into account were "*kulturfilm*", to which both Vertov and Shub were strongly opposed since they considered it had undesirable connotations that would relate their own films with explorations films and other Western productions, which they did not feel akin to, and, more importantly, they felt it undermined the "unplayed" nature of their own productions. Vertov was adamant (and one can only guess that Shub concurred) insisting on the need to establish a difference between films that recorded life as opposed to those films that recorded acting.[216]

We can find one reason to argue that it is not a far stretch to take into account the category of "documentary" for these films in the words "*documentalnost*"

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[212] Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[213] Roberts, *op. cit.,* p. 27; Hicks, *op. cit.,* p. 24.
[214] Hicks, *op. cit.,* p. 30-32.
[215] Taylor and Christie, *Film Factory*, p. 184.
[216] Hicks, *op. cit.,* p. 62.

(documentary quality) and "*dokumental'nyi*" (the adjectival form of documentary), which were in use in the Soviet Union by the mid 1920s.[217] Vertov, in discussing his film *Enthusiasm* (1931), consistently used the term "documentary film" (*dokumental'naia fil'ma*) and employed it increasingly from this point onwards. His arrival to the term could have been due to his brother Boris, who was in France, where it designated nonfiction films.[218] He is not alone in the use of "documentary", Sutyrin (the editor of *Proletarskoe kino*) refers to "documentary" as a synonym for "unplayed"; and Erofeev stresses that "documentary", "newsreel" and "unplayed" all refer to different aspects of the same phenomenon.[219] However, in the 1930s in Russia, the term felt new and foreign at a moment when the Soviet state was turning away form outside cultural influences. What is interesting in this context is that this concept of documentary, as defended by Vertov, makes a claim for the importance of filmic material as evidence and record. The form's integrity resulted problematic for policy makers in the sense that it was an obstacle to heroic portraiture, written scenarios and a willingness to stage. Vertov's notion of documentary left too much to chance.[220]

For Vertov, newsreel, Cine-Eye, documentary and unplayed film were different definitions of one and the same branch of cinema production. "Newsreel" would point to a continuous link with the accumulation of the current material of newsreel. "Cine-Eye" would refer to the recording of newsreel material. "Documentary" would specifically refer to its being "genuine", "authentic"; and "unplayed" pointed to the fact that there had been no acting, that acting was unnecessary.[221]

Another interesting fact was that there were terms related to "documentary" that were used in a derogatory manner, such as "*dokumentalizm*", which Roberts translates as "documentalist" or "documentalism" and Taylor as "documentarism".[222] A term that held different meanings for different people, but that in general was used as a diminishing and reprehensible qualification. What is especially interesting about the term is that it was used both by the opponents of Vertov to criticise him, as well as by Vertov himself to insult his critics. Thus, for some it describes a vilified militant defence of documentary integrity, and was used to accuse Vertov of "fetishization of facts". Sometimes it went further than Vertov, and "documentalists" would refer to

[217] Malitsky, *op. cit.*
[218] Hicks, *op. cit.,* p. 83.
[219] *Ibid.*, p. 156.
[220] *Ibid.*, 82-83.
[221] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[222] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

certain directors working in newsreel, unplayed or documentary film; it essentially meant that they were "formalists" and "Trotskyists".[223] For example we can mention the film critic and filmmaker Nikolai Lebedev who wrote of the *Kinoks*: "The documentalists are only looking at the world; the point however is to change it."[224] However, Vertov replied by applying the term to fiction filmmakers such as Eisentein, to which the editors of *Proletarskoe kino* responded that Vertov (and probably other filmmakers such as Shub) were portraying themselves disingenuously as "irreconcilable enemies of 'documentalism'." Specifically Sutyrin argued "Any worker in cinematography (apart from Cde. Vertov and his fellow travellers) when asked to point out the family of documentalists will name Vertov, Kaufman, Shub (…) and not Eisenstein or Room."[225] For the editors of *Proletarskoe kino* the "documentalists" were "followers of an illiterate, presumptuous and excessively pretentious theory."[226] For Vertov, on the other hand, the real enemy was "typage" and "transitional cinema" (*promezhutochnoe kino*), by which he meant "acted film", his target being Eisenstein. For Vertov this approach was the real and damned "documentalism."[227] His interpretation of "documentalism" is a hybrid form of acted films borrowing the style of *Cine-Pravda*, that is, acted films with newsreel form. Something he could see in Eisensteins work and something he had always been opposed to.[228]

Vertov had become the perfect target for the prejudices of the "new, ill-educated Party cadres," who portrayed him (and the Cine-Eyes, probably Shub as well) as intellectuals, "too internationalist", members of a "sophisticated clique with the avant-garde", lacking links to the proletariat and maybe even as a Jewish elite. Vertov and Shub shared some common notions when it came to "unplayed" filmmaking, mainly the belief in its moral superiority; however, Shub did not involve herself in the personal sniping in print. In fact, she called for calm and stated that both fiction and nonfiction had a role to play. She kept on friendly terms with all those involved in the controversy and had already distanced herself from Vertov's complete rejection of "played" cinema. For her, the real issue lay elsewhere: "I work in the area of a definite school, the school of Constructivists. The mission of this school of cinematography is to work on authentic not dramatized material… Played film appeals to the emotions of the audience, we to its

[223] Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
[224] Quoted in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 100-101.
[225] Both quotes in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
[226] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[227] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[228] Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

intellect."[229] She does attack the increasingly common practice of mixing dramatized and factual material, arguing that the audience ceases to believe in the facts (but Shub's voice does not seem to carry much weight at the time, the 1930s cinema atmosphere had changed).

1.4. EXPRESSING AND ADDRESSING A NEW REVOLUTIONARY STATE

1.4.1. CINEMA: A NEW ART FOR A NEW STATE

There are two considerations that need to be taken into account when speaking of Soviet nonfiction film production and its relationship to the country's history, first, cinema could be seen as a representation of the Soviet Union itself and, second, as an "agency for the transmission of the state's (changing) historical image and requirements."[230] Shub is not only narrating history in the sense of recounting a succession of events in time, she is narrating a new imagined space, that of a new imagined community:[231] the new Bolshevik State, an emerging state with a great desire to unify a vast and diverse population under one centralized power. There is a certain tone in her recounting, what Vivian Sobckack calls "*sermonization*", that is "the narration of past events and nation building in coherent moral tales."[232] Shub firmly believed that the representation of the Revolution and its history was one of the crucial tasks of cinema, which she described as "a method of expressing all that the Great October Revolution had brought… A new life was beginning. New people were building this life. In art – another October. Forward, innovators, seekers of the new roads! Cinematography is the art of the future"[233]

Shub was not alone in the belief of cinema's capital importance for the Revolution, her view was shared both by fellow filmmakers and Bolshevik leaders, such

[229] Quoted in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
[230] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[231] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised ed. London and New York: Verso, 2006.
[232] Sobchack, "History Happens", p. 9.
[233] Quoted in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

as Lenin who famously stated "of all the arts for us the most important is cinema;"[234] Trotsky, who described himself as an advocate of the enormous political potential of cinema,[235] and Stalin, who considered it "the greatest means of agitation."[236] Cinema, understood as a branch of art and education, was one of the fundamental tools for the fostering and dissemination of a new spirit, a socialist spirit. Cinema was seen as capable of touching the emotions and becoming an apparatus of agitation. Needless to say, cinema was not alone in this endeavour. In the Post Revolutionary Soviet Union the plans of the Proletkult (Proletarian Culture) were to contrast bourgeois culture with an entirely new proletarian culture, debates about the appropriate art for the socialist society opened up a battlefield to which Literature, Theatre, Design and Visual Arts responded.[237] The artist had a central role to play in the construction of the new Soviet man and woman; this revolution against bourgeois art was to train the human mind to see the world in a more socialistic way. The constructivists were at the forefront of this movement, which aspired to bring art into union with life. For that purpose they detached themselves from the history of art, easel painting and other artistic modes they considered individualistic and irrelevant to the new society. It was believed that a new science, art, literature, and morality would give birth to this new human being.[238] And among all the arts, cinema was paramount; it was technologically more advanced and considered more democratic, hence, it was seen as a new mode of vision, a new means of social representation, it offered a new definition of popular art, and embodied new relations of production and consumption.[239] In other words, cinema was crucial not only because of its power of representation, but of what cinema itself represented: a new artistic expression that was scientific, technological, mechanically produced and untainted by bourgeois traditions.

The concept of the artist engineer was central to the Soviet avant-garde, and so was the image of art as a machine. It was common to Constructivists, Futurists, artists

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[234] Lunacharsky, Anatoli, "Conversation with Lenin".
[235] Trotsky defined cinema as "the best instrument for propaganda, technical, educational and industrial propaganda, propaganda against alcohol, propaganda for sanitation, political propaganda, any kind of propaganda you please, a propaganda which is accessible to everyone, which is attractive, cuts into the memory and may be make a possible source of revenue;" Trotsky, Lev. "Vodka, the Church and the Cinema." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939,* edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988.
[236] Taylor, Richard. *Film Propaganda. Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*. Second ed. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009, p. 15.
[237] Raunig, Gerald. *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007, p. 151.
[238] Figes, Orlando, *Natasha's Dance*, pp. 447-448.
[239] Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory*, p. 4.

aligned with the Proletkult and the Left Front (LEF). It was crucial to Meyerhold in theatre and Vertov's Group, as well as Eisenstein, in cinema. Meyerhold envisaged the actor as an artist-engineer who organizes the "raw material" of his own body on scientific principles of time and motion, and he saw his system as the theatrical equivalent of "scientific management" in industry.[240] Soviet Avant-Garde film directors believed cinema could change the way its viewers saw the world, and that it could engineer the conscience and the technique that would do so would be montage. As has been stated above, Kuleshov would be the first, but soon after the Kinoks, Eisenstein, Shub, and others would come to see the essence of film art in the orchestration of the visual images, that is in montage.[241] Behind the approach of these artists, as well as many Bolshevik leaders, we find the influence the theories of the American engineer F.W. Taylor and his time and motion studies to divide and automate the labour tasks of industry.[242]

1.4.2. TOOL OF PERSUASION: FILM AS AGITATION

One of the implications of the notion of art as machine was that art was an intentional construction designed with specific goals in mind. The machine itself would be altered and modified until it cleanly and efficiently performed its operation.[243] The goal of the art machine in general, and cinema in particular, was to create militancy among its audience, that is, a set of attitudes and emotions. During the first years of the revolution cinema stood for all the qualities the Bolsheviks wanted associated to the new Soviet state. It represented technology, a new time, and skilled labour.

Cinema would be used as a "weapon in the struggle for unification." After the Revolution, the masses had to be further aroused and involved in the struggle to create a new order. The Bolsheviks had obtained the control of the commanding heights of the political and administrative machinery of the state, but it had not given them effective power in large areas of the country. They needed a medium that would appeal to the broad masses of population, who were illiterate and spoke over a hundred different languages. In Russia in 1920, only two out of five adults could read, so the moving

[240] Figes, Orlando, *Natasha's Dance*, p. 463.
[241] *Ibid.*, pp. 453-454.
[242] *Ibid.*, p. 463.
[243] Andrew, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

picture was a vital weapon in the battle to extend the Party's reach to the remote countryside.[244] And, due to the complex requirements and expensive equipment necessary to make a film, cinema could be controlled more easily than theatre.[245] It was seen as a tool for agitation. Russian Marxists distinguished between two forms of political persuasion: agitation and propaganda. It was thought that a propagandist would present many ideas to one or a few persons, while an agitator would present only one or a few ideas, but to a whole mass of people.[246] That is, agitation presented short, simple and effective messages that were directed to the masses. What better medium for this purpose than cinema? For cinema was the only medium of mass communication that appealed to an audience that was at the same time a mass.[247] The Soviet government made sure films travelled to many far out regions using agitational trains, or agit-trains, which would go wherever they were required, travelling around the front-line regions during the civil war.[248] The idea behind them was eloquently described by Lunacharsky, who stated "We should aim to reach a stage where our agitation and our Komsomol agitators are, as it were, equipped with portable film machine-guns with a few good films that can be alternated."[249] These trains also included quarters for the crew, a library and bookshop, a printing press, radio and equipment. Since they brought film for the first time to many regions, the Bolsheviks were easily associated in the popular mind with technology, mechanisation and progress.[250]

Most workers found it difficult to take on board complex or abstract ideas, but they were receptive to propaganda in the form of simple pamphlet stories.[251] Thus, the kind of films that were created for this purpose were short, explicit, carried simple messages, and were dealt with economy. One guiding principle of propaganda is to make whatever it defends or intends to spread uncontroversial, since controversy might inspire debate. For this reason too, historical continuity is important.[252] Shub's film follows in their footsteps in this sense. In fact, it is an excellent example of clean cut

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[244] Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, p. 451.
[245] Taylor, *Film Propaganda*, pp. 29-30.
[246] Taylor, *Film Propaganda*, p. 28. It must be kept in mind that the distinction was difficult to maintain in practice.
[247] *Ibid.*, p. 16
[248] Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, p. 452; Taylor, *Film Propaganda*, p. 32.
[249] Lunacharsky, Anatoli. "Revolutionary Ideology and Cinema – Theses." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 109-10. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988.
[250] Taylor, *Film Propaganda*, p. 32.
[251] Figes, Orlando. *A People's Tragedy. A History of the Russian Revolution*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1997, p. 132.
[252] Taylor, *Film Propaganda,* pp.12-13.

uncontroversial historical recounting, what we could refer to in Sobchack's terms as "sermonization." Which is not surprising since early agitational films would have a decisive effect on the stylistic development of the Soviet cinema, leading to the essence of economy and dynamism to attract the attention of a varied audience. Vertov's approximation, in particular, was highly influenced by Bolshevik journalism, his editing of non-fiction footage transformed film into a "powerful tool of persuasion and exhortation."[253]

What is remarkable about Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* is that it is a film about film. Kittler states that film has been filming filming, as books have always been writing writing, that media has always been advertising itself.[254] However there is an intentional meta-referential element that surpasses that "unavoidable" notion of film filming film, there is even a displacement since this film is editing editing. It is a film consciously, purposefully about film, about editing, about history being inscribed and edited both in cinema and history.

This construction, this recounting of history with film documents, with their selection and edition, this re-contextualization of film sequences, their re-consignation, can be seen as an act of *museization*. The insertion of fragments of the past in a new discourse that is exemplary, that is meant to unify and compel a large and diverse population under one unique and unproblematic shared history, holds certain points in common with the national museums during the nineteenth century, of which the Louvre is a paradigmatic example.[255]

This act of "museization" is a complex mediating operation. Shub is both working with immediacy, in the sense that those images *are* of the years she is portraying, and, at the same time, she is a *mediator* signalling a distance, taking images out of their original context (which is not the event itself either, but its first cinematic representation, or at the very least their previous cinematic representation) and out of their intended circulation, creating a new layer of archival material. Inscribing herself in the film, no matter how "aseptic" she (and others) might view her cutting. Since it is impossible to interpret without inscribing that interpretation within the archive.[256] So, inevitably, Shub is telling or, more precisely, showing how she sees recent history. She is building how it "*should"* be re-presented and she is contributing to how that history

[253] Hicks, *op. cit.,* pp. 7-8.
[254] Kittler, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
[255] This reflection is indebted to what Carol Duncan refers to as "Civilizing Ritual". Duncan, *op. cit.*
[256] Derrida, *Mal de archivo,* p. 75.

will be represented "officially." Shub is also omitting as much as she is showing; for example, there are no images of opposition to Bolsheviks, to problems within the Bolsheviks. Hers is a "clean cut" history. The film lacks the interrogation of many claims, claims that appear to be self-evident, when they are part of the revolutionary cause. Shub, or at least her films, was one of the creators of the image of the Soviet past where, as explained in Anderson's eloquent words, "the colossal class war that, from 1918 to 1920, raged between the Pamirs and the Vistula, came to be remembered/forgotten in Soviet film and fiction as 'our' civil war, while the Soviet state, on the whole, held to an orthodox Marxist reading of the struggle."[257] Shub's way of recounting recent history, narrates the coming of the Soviet Union as the expression of a popular sentiment, and does so in a completely unproblematic way.

1927 was the year that both fiction and nonfiction filmmakers had to come to terms with the challenge of celebrating the anniversary of the collapse of the Romanov dynasty and of the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917,[258] with the production of commemorating films. In this context, the different genres respond to a classification not necessarily predicated on style, or not only, but also on function. Film as a propaganda medium was essential in the development of national myths.[259] We can find one of such myths in the Revolution of February, which was heavily romanticized; it was the 'honeymoon' of the revolution. According to Figes, almost instantly the history of the revolution was reinvented to suit democratic ideals and mythic expectations, people fell in love with the 'Glorious February Revolution', as it became known, and it was said to have been a bloodless affair. The revolution was portrayed as a spiritual renewal, a moral resurrection of the people. The revolution itself was transformed into a sort of cult.[260]

Hagener speaks of "heritage films", where "a not too distant past was idealised and an 'imagined community' was constructed around the represented events."[261] Among these heritage films we can include Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and

[257] Anderson, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 202.
[258] Roberts, *op. cit.*p. 50.
[259] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[260] Figes, *A Peoples Tragedy,* pp. 340-341.
[261] Hagener, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

October, Vertov's *The Eleventh Year*, Shub's trilogy and *Moscow in October* by Boris Barnet. What they all have in common: they were made in service of the state.[262]

These commemorative films, among which we include *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, leads us to the complex problematic of the representation of historical events, which takes a new turn with mechanical reproduction technologies. As Elsaesser defends, history when it is not only what is past, but what is being past on seems to have entered a "conceptual twilight zone." In great part because it has become a past that cinema and television can "master" for us by remastering archival material.[263] Something that Shub pioneers, and that does not cease to increase as time goes by.

Even if it seems obvious, it is important to not loose sight of the fact that events are not recorded, preserved, as "they really were", the act of inscribing produces, as much as it documents, the event.[264] It is in this sense that Barthes notion of the "reduction" that takes place with the press photo is relevant. One possible outcome of technologies of reproduction and storage media is a displacement of memory.[265] Memory is not to be lost sight of. For Elsaesser history, when contrasted to memory (hence the importance he places on subject position), has become the signifier of the inauthentic "merely designating what is left when the site of memory has been vacated by the living. With the audiovisual media effortlessly re-presenting that site."[266] This idea of emptiness after life brings us back to Bazin's idea of trace, it resonates with his notion of photography as the mortuary mask, as the veronica, as the empty shell that holds semblance to something that was alive once, but even during that life was ungraspable in totality and impossible to value objectively. For Bazin this is essential for claiming truth: that trace, that carcass directly linked to its origin, whereas for Elsaesser this vacated object, the remains, is the absolute opposite, it is the signifier of inauthentic.[267] Images have become storytelling instruments, for better or for worse. That is precisely what Shub did with *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, the images are not a mere illustration but the very fabric that composes the story she is telling, the death of the old regime and birth of the Bolshevik Revolution.

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[262] *Ibid.*, p. 174.
[263] Elsaesser, Thomas. "Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From Holocaust, Our Hitler, and Heimat to Shoah and Schindler's List." In *The Persistence of History. Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, edited by Vivian Sobchack, 145-83. New York and London: Routledge, 1996, p. 145.
[264] Derrida, *Mal de archivo*, p. 24.
[265] "Once storage media can accommodate optical and acoustic data, human memory is bound to dwindle." Kittler, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[266] Elsaesser, "Subject Positions", p. 145.
[267] *Ibid*., p. 146.

1.4.3. THE FILM FACTORY-ARCHIVE

Eloquently, Soviet studios were known as "film factories" (*kinofabriki*), and debates over nonfiction film form and method, from mid to late 1920s, took place alongside the shifting of the conception of the film factory to that of a national "factory-archive." When explaining this evolution in theoretical debates, Malitsky speaks of two essential transitions: one, from a "Vertovian" to a "Shubian" documentary and, two, a historical trajectory of American scientific management theory in post-Revolutionary Russia. Both of these transitions are part of a larger transformation that went "from fragmentation, inspiration, and subjectivity, to consolidation, organisation, and centralisation." Changes that correlate in time and are intimately intertwined with a re-articulation of the relationship between citizen, nation, and state.[268]

It was during this period that the theoretical debates concluded that nonfiction film could provide a mobilized archive of the nation, of its history, and envision a future capable of aiding Soviet edification and unification. When Mayakovsky's journal *LEF* was relaunched as *Novyi Lef* (New Left) it turned to documentary as a key strategy for the transformation of art and society.[269]

The years surrounding the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution were years of review and re-assessment, both in film and about the role of cinema in uniting the Soviet nation. The Bolsheviks wanted to educate the people of the Soviet Union on their recent history. Vertov, on one hand, and Shub and the *Lef* critics, on the other, made the claim for a film factory-archive, which was believed could play a central role in cinema and in cinema's task of contributing to the "citizen-building process," it was thought that it could became a "site of pedagogy and unification."[270]

Dziga Vertov had been an early and staunch advocate of unplayed cinema against all played or fiction films. For him, all fiction films were theatrical. He defended the superiority of unplayed film and argued there was a need for the centralization of all documentary and newsreel filming, as well as the creation of an archive of such film, a "factory of facts."[271] His insistence on capturing an unperformed reality stands at the

[268] Malitsky, *op. cit.*
[269] Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[270] Malitsky, *op. cit.*
[271] Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory.*

heart of his claim to be practicing documentary filmmaking.[272] As early as 1923, Vertov argued for the need of a permanent establishment of contributors and correspondents to gather as much and varied material as possible.[273]

Shub objected that the Cine-Eyes were trying to create a monopoly for themselves.[274] She candidly defended that it was not only the Cine-Eyes who wanted to work in non-played cinema. In her article "The Manufacture of Facts" she writes "The studio must take this into account, remove its Futuristic sign and become simply a factory for non-played cinema where people could work on editing newsreels, films of the history of the Revolution made from newsreel footage, where scientific production films and general cultural films could be made as a counter-weight to played entertainment films," finishing with the unequivocal statement "We do not need a factory of facts if it is to manufacture facts."[275]

Vertov defended documentary film as a record, he insisted in the need to register.[276] Shub, on the other hand, did not feel this need *to* record; her work began with these records, which she used to construct an argument. Shub also distanced herself from the more extreme statements of the Cine-Eyes about the need to capture "life as it really is."[277]

The poet Mayakovsky also argued for greater resources to be made available for documentary film. In several instances, he vehemently expressed his position for newsreel and against acted film because "newsreel deals with real objects and facts," but he argued that newsreel should not be composed of a random collection of shots and events, it should be organized as a newspaper.[278] Shklovsky – another of the fundamental figures of *Novyi Lef* - states that it is difficult for factual filmmakers to find work, they are accused of being uninteresting, and he argues that the success of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* proves the accusers wrong. He warns, however, "a film archive

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[272] Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[273] Vertov, Dziga "The Cine-Pravda." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 84. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 84.
[274] Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory*, p. 137.
[275] Shub, Esfir. "The Manufacture of Facts." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 152. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 152.
[276] Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
[277] Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory*, p. 159.
[278] Mayakovsky, Vladimir. "Help!". In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 160-61. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 160; and Mayakovsky, Vladimir. "Speech in Debate on 'the Paths and Policy of Sovkino'" 15 October 1927." In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 171-74. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 174.

is a poison in the hand of a vulgarian. We can see how they stick the old exotic rubbish into contemporary films (…) (T)he failure to appreciate the significance of the document, the absence of a feeling of responsibility towards the audience" are pointless mistakes.[279]

What the *Lef* critics claimed for were better conditions for non-played film, specifically for the productions that followed the model inaugurated by Shub. They accused Vertov of hampering non-played film by his disdain for scripts, whereas *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* produced a coherent impression because its thematic and montage plan had been carefully devised. And regarding fiction films such as Eisenstein's *October*, they argued "For those of us in Lef this [the celebration of the tenth anniversary of October] is a task that can be executed in only one way: by a montage of documentary film shots. That is what Esfir Shub did in her films *The Great Way* and *The Fall*;"[280] and "We think that the October Revolution is such a major historical fact that any playing with this fact is unthinkable. We think that the slightest departure from historical truth in depictions of the events of October must disturb everyone who is in the slightest degree a cultured person."[281]

Malitsky and Yampolsky speak of a break with a phase dominated by Vertov, where Shub's compilation method becomes the model. *Lef* critics argued that Vertov had moved away from reality and called for a purge of authorial subjectivity, something that seemed guaranteed by what Yampolsky has refered to as "second hand material".[282] These kinds of statements are defending compilation as a genre in itself, not a means when material is lacking. Shub's two first films (*The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* and *The Great Way*, 1927) were heralded as pinnacles, as well as early standard setters not only in realm of nonfiction filmmaking, but also in the historical genre. These were films with a political agenda that were popular with critics and public. With their release a debate raged about both the form and content that the Soviet cinema should have in the future.[283] *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* became "a lynchpin upon which a new

[279] Shklovsky, "The Temperature of Cinema."
[280] The Lef Ring. "Comrades! A Clash of Views!". In *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, 225-32. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 227.
[281] *Ibid*.
[282] Malitsky, *op. cit.*; Yampolsky, *op. cit*.
[283] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

form and method for documentary filmmaking could be based."[284] It became part of a larger project designed to tame excess, to promote efficiency, and to achieve mastery through consolidation and detailed planning.[285]

It seemed as though Shub's compilation could transform the film factory-archive into a space where Taylorist principles could be applied to nonfiction film production. By "removing the subject input" of the worker, the film became "more objective and authentic". Film became an efficient space that could shape a past and Shub was celebrated because she was part of a collective, a cog in the film factory wheel, rather than an elite artist responding to inspiration.[286]

Shub's star rose during the debates in Moscow about how best to celebrate the revolutionary history and the building of the Soviet Union, while Vertov was being severely attacked by the critics.[287]According to Malitsky the reason why Shub's film and method – which combined an established research method (working with documents) with a new way of telling the historical story (through film images and intertitles) – was so well received among leftist Soviet intellectuals was because the film was able to fuse aspects of scholarly historical writing and a poetic or prosaic sensibility more closely associated with literature: "Shubian documentary practice was seen as capable of combining and/or negotiating various authoritative discourses."[288] It used facts and narrated them into a readable plot. One phrase that had been appearing increasingly often was the need for productions to be "intelligible to millions", and the ideological and historical message in Shub's films is remarkably easily legible.

Malitsky, when writing of Shub and others who embraced the compilation documentary method defends they intentionally employed a more realist aesthetic. Their position was not imposed from above but became a way for State officials and members of the intelligentsia to merge goals.[289] For Shub, unplayed film was a valuable source of genuine enlightenment and a far more persuasive propaganda tool. It had an almost moral superiority for her, it challenged and stimulated the audience's collective intellect. She argued that the workers of non-played film wanted to play a part "in the

[284] Malitsky, *op. cit*.
[285] *Ibid*.
[286] *Ibid*.
[287] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
[288] Malitsky, *op. cit.*
[289] Malitsky, *op. cit*.

rigorous construction of today," they want to exploit "the quickly passing life in all its many forms, in all its complexity, to understand it and having understood it to fix it on film."[290]

But even more important than the terminology of played or non-played was militancy: "What is important is that we are LEF."[291] The idea of filming newsreel, of recording "the here and now, contemporary people, contemporary events," is to preserve the epoch for a future generation. In fact, she holds the belief that only non-played film would "survive," they would remain interesting "because it is a small fragment of life that has really passed."[292] This was a common idea among the *Lef* activists, who regarded factual material higher than any rhetorical structure, to them "the document was eternal, the film was fleeting and the archive was the place from which films were born and to which they returned."[293] The material was understood as raw material for permanent recombination, the film archive became an endless and inexhaustible source for the future filmmaker.

It is important to point out that these debates also lead to a subordination of news to the commemoration and the cults of the hero and the leader. Starting in the late 1920s and more markedly in the 1930s, documentary and fiction film became largely indistinguishable, because what was deemed really important was its ideological stance.[294] Malitsky sees in these debates about the archives the seed of a concept that reached its germination in Socialist Realism. It was not a reaction to Vertov and Shub's work, but a continuation of their historical project. It would not be long before the Party and the apparatus were not sure if their attempts were sufficiently sound.[295] 1928 saw the beginning of an end of an era, there were hints of a purge that became official policy in 1929 and which was in full swing in 1930, where political need for simplification was paramount, in part, due to the need to penetrate the countryside.[296] Usually the decade of the 1930s is seen as an oppositional moment to the creativity of the 1920s. Malitsky argues that the utopianism of the early 1920s did not disappear, rather, the

[290] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[291] Shub, Esfir, "We Do Not Deny The Element Of Mastery", p. 185.
[292] *Ibid.*, p. 187.
[293] Hagener, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
[294] Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[295] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
[296] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

utopian elements attached to nonfiction film practice, industrial policy and nation-building policy were re-imagined and re-situated within pragmatic contexts.[297]

Shub, as so many of her peers before her, resulted problematic for authorities; do to her use of material from the past, since this past's official representation was evolving as she worked.[298] In part, her ability to manipulate images ironically distanced her from the new and favoured directors of the 1930s, which were more simplistic in their mythologizing of the past.[299] During those years she found it hard to get commissions, but her ability to produce a message from material that would naturally lend itself to a rather different reading once again made her a useful contributor to Soviet cinema for a brief period during the Second World War Years, starting with *Spain* (1939), followed by *Fascism Will Be Defeated* (1941) and *Homeland* (1942).[300]

1.5. CONCLUSION

I have spent a great deal of time discussing Esfir Shub and her film *The Romanov Dynasty* (1927) because I find her work so eloquent, and her concerns so revealing, when considering what this thesis has set out to study. Her film introduces certain approximations to the potential of recycling footage, to the polysemy of images, and to the plasticity of film, which have important implications for historical representation and cultural production in a landscape that increasingly accumulates cultural detritus, specifically in the shape of moving images.

I have gone into detail because I have found it necessary to reflect on Shub in relation to her time and her peers. She is undoubtedly a product of her time and environment, yet at the same time she is remarkably unique. Her work is pioneering in many ways to the development of cinema in general and historical documentary in particular. Hers is a time of revolution, of the crumbling of old orders and the rising of new ones, both political and technological.

She also represents such an interesting contrast to the figure of the male genius of the early Soviet cinema, which has so easily been found in Eisenstein and Vertov,

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[297] Malitsky, *op. cit.*
[298] Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
[299] *Ibid.*, p. 122.
[300] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

and of the pioneers of the documentary tradition, so commonly seen in Grierson and Flaherty. She is above all a technician, a female technician, in love with her craft. She could be seen as a *producer*, in Benjamin's terms. Stollery states that Shub was the filmmaker who exemplified the theory of the author as producer in actual practice, whereas for other male authors it became part of their biography.[301] To be a producer in Benjamin's terms implies that "the author," who has reflected deeply on the conditions of his or her present-day production, his or her work will never be merely work on "products" but always, at the same time, on the means of production. What matters, for Benjamin, is that this producer induces other producers to produce and also puts an improved apparatus at their disposal. This is not a minor issue, for Benjamin defends that "this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, readers or spectators into collaborators."[302]

There is no doubt that Shub reflected deeply on the conditions of film production of her time, she expressed her thoughts and her actions were true to her declarations. Her work as a film director influenced nonfiction filmmaking and historical representation. On the one hand, she became the model to emulate and, on the other, her way of filmmaking can be seen in terms of an attempt to formulate a new, less individualized approach to film production; which could be perceived as an extension of her work as a film editor, that is, a type of work that was notably under-credited and to a large extent performed by invisible women.

The way she worked on film, on the material itself, also had a deep impact on Soviet film conservation. Not only did she defend the creation of an archive to be at the disposal of future filmmakers, she herself was responsible for the conservation of historical footage, carefully cataloguing the enormous amount of material that passed through her hands. According to Leyda "Schub's orderly mind evolved its own rules: she never cut a piece of original film, positive or negative, and never employed an original piece – her first move was to make duplicate negatives of every metre she considered using."[303]

Her status as a film editor situates her in an "in-betweenness" of sorts, especially if you take into account how little recognition was given to that role at the time. She

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[301] What is more, according to Stollery the issue of gender is integral to any consideration of the theoretical concept of the author as producer. Stollery, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-99.
[302] Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer." In *Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, edited by Peter Demetz, 220-38. New York: Schocken Books, 1989, p. 233.
[303] Leyda, Jay. "Bridge. Esther Schub Shapes a New Art (1927)." In *Films Beget Films. Compilation Films from Propaganda to Drama*, 22-31. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1964, p. 28.

found it hard to move on to directing, and when she finally did manage to helm her own film she was initially denied credits. Her recognition as an author was problematic, it seems it would have been completely unlikely that she would have been treated as a film director in her own right if it not had been for the critics of *Novy Lef* and if there had not been a need to find a figure to oppose to Vertov and Eisenstein. So to a certain extent, it seems as if for many she would have just been a "glorified" editor not quite a director-author. She was obviously much more than a mere cutter, but knowing how and when and why to cut was essential. She would read and re-read images, analyse the sequences in her hand intensely, studying them to construct films that represented recent historical events in simple terms. However, it seems that all the stress at the time was on the side of the camera, the gathering of images, which is quite paradoxical when you take into account how much of the theoretical debates were dedicated to montage. Shub is, first and foremost, a reader of images, an exceptional one at that. But she is also a maker of stories, a storyteller. One can gather from her own words that she had a sense of being a part of something much bigger, a sense of not needing to be claimed as an "Author" with capital "A". She is concerned with the conditions of film production and does what she can to improve those conditions, to improve that "apparatus".

She not only changes the production of documentary film and the notion and conditions for a film-archive, she also influences the way history is told, how it is seen. By mediating these scenes, she is acting as a mediator with the past. We have seen at length how, for Shub, these images had a direct link to the past, how this notion found an theoretical articulation in the writing of Bazin years later, which has been strongly questioned by many authors since. It is now a common assumption that the *represented* is seen via the *representation*, that there is a transformation taking place in the process. I would like to defend that this is not a reason to rest in a sceptical position towards cinematic representations, but a platform from which to start to think about them. Shub is a *mediator*, so is her film, as well as the other two films that shall be seen at length in the following chapters. This thesis can be seen as another mediation, one that hopes to offer a critical and creative reflection open to further critiques and creations, open to further responses. The aim is not to have a final say, but to participate in an extended

dialogue, travelling the distance between historical events and what remains of them, in particular, of what remains in cinematic form.[304]

Shub can also be seen as a storyteller, one that gathers dispersed remains of events that in her head and in her narrative sum up the history of the Revolution. She makes it hers and tells it anew with images. I use the notion of storyteller in Benjamin's terms.[305] He speaks of a change, a loss of experience that took place after the First World War, a time that marked Shub and her generation, who not only confronted the Great War, but also the civil war in Russia. According to Benjamin, the source for storytellers used to be stories passed from mouth to mouth, and the nature of every story was to contain something useful, a storyteller had counsel for the readers, something that Benajmin saw waver and blamed this wavering on the decreasing communicability of experience. This process went way back, Benjamin found its earliest symptom in the rise of the novel, which unlike the story depended completely on the book and it did not come nor go back to oral tradition. The storyteller, on the other hand, took what he told from experience and in turn made it the experience of those who were listening. He saw another determining factor in the decline of storytelling in the press, one of the instruments of the middle class in fully developed capitalism, which he defined as a new form of communication that was information. And the issue Benjamin had with information was that it laid claim to prompt verifiability and, more importantly, its prime requirement to appear "understandable in itself". Information had to sound plausible, which made it incompatible with the spirit of storytelling. What is more, the value of information did not survive the moment in which it was new. A story, on the other hand, according to Benjamin, preserved and concentrated its strength for a long time. Thus, in his reasoning, storytelling is an artisan form of communication; it is a form of craftsmanship.

Shub went further then the Revolution itself to explain it. She took images of the old regime, images that were "old news" to cement her story. Those images were the

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[304] "Mediators are fundamental. Creation's all about mediators. Without them noting happens. They can be people – for a philosopher, artists or scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists – but things too… Whether they're real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. It's a series. If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost. I need my mediators to express myself, and they'd never express themselves without me: you're always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own." Deleuze, Gilles. *Negotiations 1972-1990*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 125.

[305] Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 83-109. New York: Schocken Books, 1988.

story. She made those "old images", those remains of obsolete "information" interesting once again by linking them with the present. In a sense she is a chronicler, as defined by Walter Benjamin, she displayed history as she saw it, basing her historical tale on a divine plane of salvation, an inscrutable one. There is an interpretation, which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definitive events, but the way they are embedded in the great inscrutable way of the world.[306]

Shub in telling her tale of history is building something; her account can be seen as *museistic* or "sermonizing".[307] Just as the public art museums of the 19th century served the ideological needs of emerging bourgeois nation-states by providing them with a new kind of civic ritual, the Bolsheviks set out in search of platforms to express the "new world" they were determined to create, as well as its new inhabitants. Cinema offered a way to experience all that was new, scientific, "modern" and anti-bourgeois. Filmic representation was persuasive, emotionally appealing, easy to transport and did not require literacy. Documentary filmmaking in particular held certain claims of authenticity and of truth that are still very present in theoretical debates. Shub's particular historical representation was accessible, or in terminology of the time "intelligible". On top of all this, cinema was in itself an esteemed object, in the sense that it was portrayed as a modern, technological, scientific, and collaborative art, which was received by mass audiences. All this made it a perfect vehicle for Bolshevik ideology. In the pages above Shub has been described in relation to the historical materialist claimed by Benjamin; however, at the same time, her work can be seen to slip into the danger we were alerted to by him. Her work is biased, it is put to the service of an ideology, of a dogma, and her questioning only has one objective: the imperialist past, the Tsar. In this sense, her work also exemplifies the silencing capacity of closed narratives, of propaganda. She creates an image of a specific episode of history, a very clear image that leaves aside all the complexities inherent in the events that took place. An image that was easy to understand and that would have seemed quite difficult to question, for it made the Revolution appear as an organic, natural event and her argument relied on the fact that her images were not recreations but footage taken from newsreel and factual sources.

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[306] *Ibid*.
[307] Sobchack, "History Happens", p. 9.

Shub's film tells a story of "progress," it is an accumulative narrative in line with "historicism's division of the past into a succession of discrete stages," which "in the advance of knowledge effectively relegates 'things from the past' to the category of waste." Benjamin defended that true historical thought must involve overcoming the opposition of progress and decadence. For him, decadence was the by-product of the system of representation itself, a system that produced knowledge only by separating the "productive" and "forward looking" part of an epoch from that which is cast off as "retrograde" and "obsolescent". Which lead him to propose that we require a "displacement of angle of vision". The idea would be to subject the negative element itself to continuous revision in the tension between value and non-value.[308] What we arrive at is that "waste" as an epistemological category is volatile, and that things that have fallen by the wayside acquire unforeseen value and status insofar as they lack contour, precisely because they are fluid as well as opaque.[309]

It took great audacity to use the footage that Shub did the way that she did, i.e. to use old, tsarist footage purposefully to construct the visual history of the Revolution. She turned what was deemed "waste" into something of value. She went beyond mere recycling, she did not re-edit footage for lack of better material nor was it a minor trait in her film production. The *images themselves were the story*. What better way to represent the backwardness of the old power than using the very images that power used to represent itself? By doing so, she is also building a film on film.

[308] Neville, Brian and Villeneuve, Johanne ed. *Waste-Site Stories: The Recycling of Memory*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002., pp. 2-3.
[309] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Chapter 2

FROM WASTE TO WORTH: RECYCLING MOVING IMAGES

2.1. INTRODUCTION

I have used Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* as an introduction to the main concerns of this thesis, which have to do with how the recycling of footage enables a dialogue with the past and its representation, and how questioning certain moving images is a means for thought and inquiry. As Jaimie Baron argues, we are not just readers but also viewers of history. Visual media has arguably become the chief carrier of historical meaning in our culture, leading to a situation in which we experience the past through film, television and the Internet as much – if not more – than from books and articles.[310] More than ever before, our living conditions depend on remote events that we have very little control over, and that reach us via the ubiquitous corporate news coverage.[311] However, this phenomenon goes way back and its problems remain the same in nature. How can we know what has happened or what is happening? How do we know if what we are being shown is the truth, if it is simply incomplete or purposefully misguided? If our experience of historical events is mainly through factual images, which are traversed by notions such as "reality", "truth", "objectivity" - and nowadays "live" and "direct" - which are themselves debatable, to say the least, what can be done to not be pushed into a corner and limited to the role of passive bystander?

Hito Steyerl defends that this uncertainty, far from being a hindrance, is the core quality of contemporary documentary mode as such and that the questions which documentaries trigger are substantially different from those associated with fictional modes of filmmaking.[312] The new technologies of representation born in the 19th century gave birth to a specific kind of experience, the experience of events through the images that capture them, which also created *the need to interrogate these images*, both as representation of events and in themselves. The films seen in detail in this thesis offer one way of interrogating, analysing, and commenting on the images they reuse.

I have chosen to approach these films under three different prisms, in first place, as documentary films, which means that they strive to represent and explain the real

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[310] Baron, Jaimie. *The Archive Effect. Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.
[311] Steyerl, Hito. "Documentary Uncertainty." *Re-visions*, no. 1 (2011).http://re-visiones.net/spip.php?article37 (Last Accessed October 17 2014).
[312] *Ibid.*

world, and as factual discourses they are open to criticism and evaluation.[313] In second place, as films that recycle moving images not as an illustration to an argument, but that build the story they recount with those very images, the images are the story. My contention is that the appropriation of this material is a creative act that opens a space for reflection, a way of seeing anew, giving room to debate and extending an invitation to make new readings. And, in third place, as essays, for the directors behind the films are not only using audiovisual documents repurposing them into a new discourse, they offer a dialogue, opening their productions to further debate and questioning. They are probing, analysing, trying, and basically putting old images into action once again, subverting, completing or subtracting different meanings. They are pronouncements of subjects on the events of the world around them, they point in many directions and renounce definitive closure.

What does a Russian film released in 1927 have in common with compilation or found footage films of the 1980s and 1990s? What does it share in common with the current situation within the mediasphere? I would say a lot, in spite of all the differences it has with the two films that will be dealt with in the following chapters. I have discussed Shub's film at length because it is an excellent example of questions we can ask of cinema, or better yet of the moving image in general. It is an early example of a phenomenon or mode of expression that today is commonplace and seems ever growing with the advance of media and communication technology.

Shub is mentioned quite frequently as the pioneer of found footage, and yet not many authors go beyond the mention. Her film is extraordinarily complex and her time is also one of "in between", a moment of dying old orders and new orders looking for representation via new technology. Her film helps line out the central concerns of the thesis, and by doing so, singles out how these concerns, which are related to history and technology, cross over them and go beyond. These issues go beyond specific time periods, and have much to do with how we regard knowledge, reality, how much we value some documents in detriment of others, how we look back and how we are fed historical narratives, and it offers a possibility: that of reconsidering, of interrogating moving images that are in themselves so convincing, so seductive and can be as misleading as the person who articulates them wants them to be.

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[313] Carroll, Noël. "From Real to Reel: Entangled in Nonfiction Film." In *Theorizing the Moving Image*, 224-52. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 232.

2.2.THE DOCUMENT IN DOCUMENTARY

Documentary as a genre or category is quite problematic. I refer to documentary in a broad sense; I understand it as a fluid concept that, instead of holding irreconcilable oppositions with fiction films and artistic practices, holds a series of relationships with them. Rather than fixing on a closed definition of "documentary", or of nonfiction, it might be more productive to reflect and discuss a myriad of approaches to this kind of filmmaking. Many attempts have been made to define these terms, and what they offer are the preferred uses and thoughts of the people behind said definitions. One could say that definitions are helpful in the sense that they draw attention to important properties of the different works that are referred to as nonfiction and/or documentary. We could describe "documentary" and "nonfiction", as Plantinga does, using Wittgenstein's notion of "open concepts".[314] I have limited myself to a selection of a few approaches since my objective is not to give an exhaustive account of this terrain, but to better locate the films discussed in the thesis within the world of film production and to shed some light on what they have to offer as critical and cultural endeavours.

2.2.1. THE CREATIVE TREATMENT OF ACTUALITY

In the previous chapter, some mention has been made to the term "documentary" or, more precisely, to the relatable terms in Russian, in order to better understand Shub's film and the context from which it emerged. Having seen at length how she defined her work and the words employed by her contemporaries and peers at that time in the Soveit Union, one of the conclusions we arrive at is that the understanding of "documentary" is inevitably related to the film industry that produces it, to the time and politics surrounding their production and distribution.

It might be helpful now to turn to the term's first appearance and uses in the English language. Its first written record is commonly credited to John Grierson, who

[314] Plantinga, Carl R. *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 14-15.

supposedly gave currency to it in 1926 in a review of Flaherty's film *Moana*.[315] There he writes that the this film had "documentary value", however interesting this feature is to Grierson, he praises the film more highly for transmitting a poetic feeling, which according to him has a profound effect on the spectator. In Grierson's words: "The film time and again induces a philosophical attitude on the part of the spectator. It is real, that is why."[316] He concludes that all the scenes are beautiful and true. Grierson is also credited with the first definition of "documentary"; which is usually succinctly quoted as "the creative manipulation of actuality". Said definition does not shed much light on the matter, since the same could be applied to many fiction films. However, it might be helpful to go back to the text where Grierson published these words; they belong to an article that is striving to define the role of the documentary film producer, and his precise words were: "Documentary, or the creative treatment of actuality, is a new art with no such background in the story and in the stage as the studio product so glibly possesses."[317] Basically, Grierson is defining documentary not so much in opposition to fiction films as in opposition to studio productions. Also, the fact that it is an art, that he considers it as a creative endeavour also distances it from newsreel or the "information film." For Grierson the representation of social issues called for dramatization.[318] Basically, Grierson defined documentary against what it was not, he considered travelogues and newsreels as lower forms of factual film. The world of documentary proper went beyond plain descriptions of natural materials, to arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it. In his own words, "even so complex a world as ours could be patterned for all to appreciate it if only we got away from the servile accumulation of fact and struck for the story which held the facts in living organic relationship together."[319]

All this leads us to two important characteristics in Grierson's notion of documentary, which could arguably be applied to Vertov and Shub, as well as other

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[315] However, Cousins and Macdonald credit the American ethnographic filmmaker Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952) with being the first person to pen the term "documentary" in the English language more than a decade before Grierson, in a prospectus for The Continental Film Company issued in 1913, partially reprinted as: Curtis, Edward S. "In the Land of the Head Hunters." In *Imagining Reality. The Faber Book of Documentary*, edited by Mark Cousins and Kevin Macdonald, 21-22. London: Faber and Faber, 2006.
[316] Gierson, John. "John Grierson: Flaherty's Poetic Moana." In *The Documentary Tradition*, edited by Lewis Jacobs, 25-26. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979 (Original source: The Moviegoer (Grierson, John), "Review of Moana, *The New York Sun*, February 8 1926), p. 26.
[317] Grierson, John. "The Documentary Producer." *Cinema Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1933 1933): 7-9. https://archive.org/stream/cinema02gdro#page/n11/mode/2up; (Last accessed March 5th 2015.
[318] Plantinga, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Bruzzi, Stella, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[319] Quoted in Rosen, Philip, "Document and Documentary", p. 64.

pioneers. One, documentary contrary to newsreel, is a creative endeavour that can be imbued with poetry, philosophy and beauty. Dramatization was seen as necessary in the treatment of events, for that very reason Grierson and Flaherty, as well as Vertov, intervened in the material they filmed, they provoked situations; in their view these mechanisms did not render the footage any less true. And, two, contrary to studio productions, documentary holds claims of truth, it is believed to hold a direct link with reality. This claim to truth in early documentary should be taken into account within the broader context of modernism's self-confidence in the promise of full legibility.[320] Shub, as we have seen, even adds a moral superiority to factual filmmaking.

Nowadays Grierson's notion seems contradictory, but it is this very contradiction what makes it so interesting. On the one hand, he merits documentary for being true and, on the other, he acknowledges the necessity for dramatization, for representation via mechanisms that are shared with fiction films. We could conclude that Grierson thinks of documentary as a representational model of filmmaking, but it is also important to stress that the notion of film as record is just as crucial. We can also read an assumption into it, that of an original unadulterated truth, which leads to the idea of a direct link between "unplayed" images and truth.[321] We have been dealing with the problematics of this approach in the chapter dedicated to Shub, who, on the one hand, believed that factual images were far superior for the representation of historical events than staged ones; and, on the other hand, her work demonstrated how those images were completely dependent on interpretation and could be made to represent the very opposite of their original intended meaning.

2.2.2. THE FACT / FICTION DIVIDE

Many authors feel more at home using the term "nonfiction", but I rather stick to "documentary" for these films. Nonfiction is just as hard to define, if not harder, for it only states what it is not: fiction. It seems important to point out that, since cinema's

[320] Renov argues that this is particularly apparent during what he calls the pinacle moments of documentary, which he locates in the Soviet Union of the 1920s and Britain in the 1930s. Renov, Michael. "Documentary Disavowals and the Digital." In *The Subject of Documentary*, 130-47. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, pp. 130-131.

[321] For Stella Bruzzi, "The crux of the problema when considering the potential differences between film as record and as representation, is the relationship between the human and the mechanical eye" (Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, p. 15).

inception, it seems to have been divided into two factions: cinema of fact and cinema of fiction. Some have even seen this divide in the very pioneers of the medium, arguing that the Lumiére brothers with their *actualités* represent the first category and that George Méliès with his fantasy films represents the second. However, these early filmmakers have a lot in common, for one, their work was seen as a manifestation of the marvels of technologies and they were commonly presented in fairs where they were presented as entertainment and fascinated the public for their novelty.

To declare the Lumiére actualités as documentary films seems like quite a stretch. They filmed and projected scenes taken from everyday life, such as a train arriving at a station, workers leaving a factory or a baby being fed. They soon had several cameramen travelling the world both screening their films and shooting new footage of what they found, creating an extensive catalogue of recorded moving images. However informative these visual records might have been, it is hard to defend them as documentaries. Actuality films lacked elements claimed by both documentary and the mainstream ethos: sequenciation, which provides for centralizing and restricting meanings derived from the points at which actual contact with the real is asserted.[322] Similarly newsreel, which aimed at giving an account of events taking place at the time, turns out to be just as hard to defend as documentary. All this begs the question, so what makes a film a documentary? Weinrichter argues that cinema begun by registering reality, but "documentary" cinema was not born with it. For there to be a nonfiction cinema its contrary, fiction, also had to come into existence.[323] The first years of cinema were dominated by nonfiction film as entertainment; the actuality film was a leading commercial film product up to 1907-1908. It was not until 1917 that the fictional feature film became instituted as the leading product of commercial filmmaking.[324]

One of the first hurdles we find in the opposition between reproducing reality and representing fiction is that reality is not reproducible. If one strives to reproduce reality, what one is doing is trying to represent it and, inevitably, with the same tools and mechanism used by fiction. According to Weinrichter, the very conception of documentary film stems from a problematic double presumption, since it is defined, in first place, in opposition to fiction film and, in second place, as a representation of

[322]Rosen, "Document and Documentary", p. 74.
[323] Weinrichter, Antonio. *Desvíos De Lo Real: El Cine De No Ficción*. Madrid: T & B, 2004, p. 25.
[324] Rosen, "Document and Documentary", pp. 72-73.

reality. Here lays an essential problem of any form of representation, which inevitably will have to deal with strategies that will link it to fiction.[325]

The convention of separating that which supposedly reproduces reality from that which represents a world of fantasy can be linked to the West's realist tradition, where fact and fiction are opposed. As White has claimed, the founding presupposition of Western realism is based on the opposition between fact and fiction. In his words, "any attempt to provide an objective account of the event (…) must conjure with two circumstances: one is that the number of detail identifiable in any singular event is potentially infinite; and the other is that the 'context' of any singular event is infinitely extensive or at least is not objectively determinable."[326]

However, to say that it is impossible to reproduce reality is not the same as saying there are no truthful accounts or that all representations are false. Plantinga prudently states that "nonfictions assert a belief that certain objects, entities, states of affairs, events, or situations actually occur(ed) or exist(ed) in the actual world as portrayed."[327] It is important that he articulates it as a *belief*, that of a nonfiction filmmaker. It might be more prudent to say that "documentary" concerns itself with representing the observable world, and the documentary filmmaker draws on the past and present actuality, on the world of social and historical experience to construct an account of events. But this could also be argued about many fiction films. However, embedded with this there is a claim at the centre of all documentary representation: that a documentary depiction of the socio-historical world is factual and truthful. These truth claims reflect a tacit agreement between documentary producers and an audience that the representation is based on the actual social-historical world, not a world imaginatively conceived.[328]

Noël Carroll takes issue with how film studies have theorized the nonfictional image. According to him, at the start of post-modernist scepticism the central dilemma of theory was the belief that documentary was "necessarily biased" because "motion picture technology is inherently and necessarily selective," and that any claims it might have to objectivity are thus "foreclosed a priori." In this respect, Bruzzi draws two important conclusions from these kind of arguments, first, that there is something about

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[325] Weinrichter, *Desvíos de lo real*, p. 15.
[326] White, Hayden. "The Modernist Event." In *The Persistance of History. Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, edited by Vivian Sobchack, 17-39. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 22.
[327] Plantinga, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[328] Beattie, Keith. *Documentary Screens. Nonfiction Film and Television*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, pp. 10-11.

nonfiction film that seems to render it, in contradistinction to other things (such as sociological treatises), uniquely incapable of objectivity; and, second, that selectivity equals bias.[329] Carroll defends that this problem has been dealt with as if it were specific to nonfiction film and not other scientific or historical discourses. Documentary cinema shares the same problems as other factual discourses, and documentaries that deal with historical events share the same problems as other historical discourses.

It is difficult to conceive a treatment of historical reality that does not use fiction techniques in its representation. The camera does not make truth claims, it is people who do. The use of a camera implies a selection and it influences human behaviour, it inevitably shapes what it sets out to capture. But the impossible aspiration of objectivity in documentary cinema is not exclusive to documentary cinema, and is not synonymous with being false. Carroll argues that in any field of research or argument there are patterns of reasoning, routines for assessing evidence and standards for observations and for the use of sources and that abiding by these practices is believed to be the best method for getting *at* the truth.[330]

Bruzzi proposes we accept that a documentary can never be the real world, that the camera can never capture life as it would have unravelled had it not interfered, and the results of this collision between apparatus and subject are what constitutes a documentary. She defines documentaries as "performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming."[331] According to her understanding, a documentary is more of a meeting in a crossroads between the observable world, its record, its manipulation in a visual representation and discourse, the reception of the viewer, its new immersion in the observable world.

[329] Bruzzi, *op. cit.,* p. 7.
[330] Carroll, *op. cit.,* p. 231.
[331] Bruzzi, *op. cit.,* p. 10.

2.2.3. THE DOCUMENT IN DOCUMENTARY

> "(D)ocumentary has always implicitly acknowledged that the 'document' at its heart is open to reassessment, reappropriation and even manipulation without these processes necessarily obscuring or rendering irretrievable the document's original meaning, context or content."
> Stella Bruzzi[332]

Shub's film is fascinating as a documentary, among other things, because the "document" plays an important part. She turns scraps of dismissed film into documents. Not all documentary films do this, but it is a constant effect in compilation or found footage films, they turn film into document. However, this does not mean that all compilations or found footage products are documentaries, they can do "pop collages," ludic remixes without any claim to documentary discourse. One can deal with documents in multiple ways. So this begs the question, where does the documentary begin?

The images re-edited in the films discussed in this thesis have been *read* as documents by the directors of the films, and as such they have been used as the raw material for their films, not as a mere illustration. They are the elements that construct a historical discourse that reflects both on the events captured by the images as well as on their condition as images. This is a reflection not only on the historical events portrayed, but also on the images by which we know (or presume to know) what happened. They are what we have left. They have an impact on us as viewers, as readers of images. Plantinga defends that documentary can be a kind of reading, in the sense that we choose how to read the images before us. He also notes that one could view fiction films nonfictionally.[333] But the films included in this thesis offer a working of audiovisual documents and a commentary on them, just by the way they are used. In these cases what we find are "document-commentary" via the documents themselves. It is with this very notion of film as providing indexical traces of a real past we approach the convergence of documentary cinema and historiography.[334] But the film recordings are not enough to make a documentary, something had to be added to the indexical capacity of the medium, which makes documentary something other than newsreel and

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[332] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[333] Plantinga, *op. cit.,* p. 19.
[334] Rosen, "Document and Documentary", p. 63.

travelogue, something more profound (if you will), and according to pioneers such as Grierson and Shub, something with a social mission.[335]

If every film image is supposed to be apprehended as a preservation from the past, even if what is preserved is fiction, part of the stake in making documentaries is controlling documents, understood as indexical traces of the presence of a real past. The scope of such questions is not limited to documentary as a "mode" or "genre" of cinema; it suggests another path of understanding that cultural history. This idea of "documentary as a mode of understanding the nature, potential, and functions of cinema and indexical representations, is in intimate ways intricated with the concept of *historical* meaning."[336] Rosen argues that if shots as indexical traces of past reality may be treated as documents, a documentary can be treated as a conversion from the document. This conversion involves a synthesizing knowledge claim, by virtue of a sequence that sublates an "undoubtable referential field of pastness into meaning."[337] Rosen points out one aspect of modern social life, which was already in place in Grierson's time, the mass media. In historiography, an original document from the actual past was unique, the historian had to go to it, it was unreachable for most readers of history, except in the format of facsimiles. But in film, a negative image of a shot that documents a fragment of the actual past can be processed into a relatively countless number of positive images.[338]

New technologies of representation were crucial to modernity's reconceptualization of time and its representability. Doane writes on how with the diffusion of pocket watches and the worldwide standardization of time (for the better efficiency of the railroad and telegraph), time no longer was *lived* or experienced the same way, it was externalized and had to be consulted. The idea of time as continuum gave way to a time that was read and calculated. Photography and cinema also had a profound effect on the conception of time, of the past and its representability, leading to a certainty in the absolute representability of things and moments.[339] So, in a sense, we could say that current world events and recent history also became externalized. What once had to be experience *in situ* or by oral account (such as the experience detailed by Benjamin when explaining his notion of the storyteller, that is, a person who

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[335] *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.
[336] *Ibid.,* p. 65.
[337] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[338] *Ibid.,* p. 79.
[339] Doane, Mary Ann. "The Representability of Time." In *The Emergence of Cinematic Time. Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*, 1-32. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2002.

internalized an experience and shared it with others, creating a new experience out of his or her own), was now attainable via mechanic reproduction. This gives birth to a new kind of experience, the experience of events through the images that capture them. It also creates *the need to interrogate these images*, both as representation of events and in themselves. These films are one way of interrogating, analysing, and offering a commentary on the images they reuse.

2.2.4. OTHER APPROACHES TO DOCUMENTARY

Vivian Sobchack insightfully points out that *documentary* designates more than a cinematic *object*, it also designates "a *particular subjective* relation to an objective cinematic or televisual text. In other words, documentary is less a *thing* than an *experience* – and the term names not only a cinematic object, but also the experienced 'difference' and 'sufficiency' of a specific mode of consciousness and identification with the cinematic image."[340] Sobchack speaks of different modes of subjective spectatorship and argues that our relationship with cinema is dynamic and fluid. She uses J. P. Meunier's classification of receptive modes, which are divided into three categories, based on three types of audiovisual material, which are: home movies, documentaries and fiction films. Meunier bases his categorization on the condition that all kinds of footage give us the presentation of objects to our perception, those objects are not really there except as images. This does not mean they are not real, just because they are absent, but that their absence is the representative characteristic of cinema. That absence is modified by our personal and cultural knowledge of the existential position of an object in relation to our own perception. There is a double positioning, first, our conscious posits us as existential subjects in relation to the screen and, two, our conscious positions the existential status of what we see in relation to what we know of the world we live in. Home movies present objects we know specifically and consequently work through evocation, as a catalyst. Documentary film and its reception is dependant on our cultural and existential knowledge, but also with what we do not know. When confronting a documentary, we know how to posit this object through

[340] Sobchack, Vivian. "Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfiction Film Experience." In *Collecting Visible Evidence*, edited by Jane Gaines and Michael Renov, 241-54. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 241.

understanding and learning, and we structure this experience through a relationship between past and present. In third place we find fiction films, which are unknown objects, we are more dependent of the screen for specific knowledge, we see them in a context, we see them as "unreal" or "imaginary" but not as "absent". They offer a direct experience in the sense that for us these objects do not exist anywhere else, only there in a virtual world.[341]

This system speaks of a subjective relation with images, which can fluctuate, these are not clean-cut categories, we usually transit them. The spectator is an active agent when establishing what is memory, what is fiction, and what is document. In this Sobchack concurs with Rancière, in the sense that both defend that the spectator's role is not a passive one.[342] Rancière also argues that documentary cinema, as opposed to fiction films, does not have to produce the feeling of the real. It can treat the real as information to understand, to reflect on. According to him, what documentary cinema can do better than fiction is establish concordances and discordances, between different narrative voices, and between images of different times and different origins and with variable meanings. What he terms "documentary fiction" invents new ways of connecting new plots with historical documents, in the same vein as fiction films unite and separate, in the relationship between story and character, between frame and sequence, affirming the potential of the visible, the word and movement. [343]

Rancière also thinks of the documentary in relation to memory and with the idea of creating memory. Understanding memory as a determinate group and a specific ordering of signs. The abundance of information or of images does not create more memory, it only makes it harder. Memory must be built against the overabundance of information just as much as against its absence. Memory must be built as a link between information, testimonies and the traces of actions. Memory in this sense is the work of fiction. Making fiction neither a beautiful story nor a vile lie, nor is it a truth that tries to pretend to be so.[344]

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[341] Vivian Sobchack, "Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfiction Film Experience", pp. 241-243.
[342] Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipation of the Spectator*. London and New York: Verso, 2009.
[343] Rancière, Jacques. *La Fábula Cinematográfica. Reflexiones Sobre La Ficción En El Cine*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2005, pp. 28-9.
[344] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

2.3. RECYCLING MOVING IMAGES

2.3.1.INTRODUCTION

"Appropriation has become the lingua franca of the digital era." Jaimie Baron[345]

The advent of Internet and the development of capture and editing software has made the recycling of moving images widely available and easy to produce, reproduce and consume; exponentially multiplying both audio-visual objects of this nature and the uses they are put to, as well as the challenges these practices face, namely issues related to ownership, copyright and piracy. This is a significant and complex phenomenon that well merits research, however, the aim of this thesis is to reflect on the period previous to this "big bang" of found footage or compilation production. Since both the recycling of cultural objects within artistic practice and the re-editing of footage in new films find their roots long before the turn of the 20th century.

Nicolas Bourriaud argues that the recycling of cultural objects into new cultural objects that are once again put into circulation is a symptom of our time. He uses the term "postproduction", the technical term that addresses all the operations film and video are put to after being shot, to describe a phenomenon that he perceives in the art produced since the 1990s.[346]

The unfolding of every developed art form depends on the evolution of technology to a certain form of art, in the sense that traditional art forms in certain phases of their development work strenuously toward effects, which later are effortlessly attained by the new ones. Social changes also play an important role promoting a change in receptivity.[347] This thesis will elaborate on that "strenuous" work towards effects, which will be effortlessly attained with the expansion of Internet and audio-visual software. We have seen Shub's pioneering work in detail in order to introduce a series of issues that have been present practically since the inception of moving images and that remain prescient today. One of which is the need to interrogate images, specifically factual images that serve as the records of historical events. All

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[345] Baron, Jaimie, *The Archive Effect*, p. 174.
[346] Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2007.
[347] Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 217-51. New York: Schocken Books, 1988, p. 249-250.

three films appropriate historical footage, they "hijack" it, they take it out of context and inscribe it in a new discourse, they offer the possibility to see these images anew. The main area of interest of this thesis is on these issues and how certain filmmakers confronted them in the 1980s and 1990s, using two very different films as case studies: *The Atomic Cafe* (1982) by The Archives Project and *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992) by Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica. The limitation to just two films is far from ideal, since there are many films, which are complex, rich in content and shape, that could have been used as case studies. There is also a very extensive bibliography of what is commonly referred to as found footage. Many of these publications offer exhaustive accounts of films made with recycled materials and the directors that choose to approach the moving image by appropriation, re-edition and critical commentary. However, I have found it necessary to limit myself to the two films mentioned (and Shub's film as a pioneering effort) due to restrictions of time and space.

All three films correspond with specific moments in time, moments of both historical and technological transformation. The first film, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927) by Esfir Shub, corresponds with the beginning of cinema as a mature art form. By mature I mean an art form that has ceased to lean on other disciplines, such as theatre and fine arts – although it still holds complex relationships with said disciplines -, and has developed concerns and a language of its own. It is also a crucial time for the definition of "documentary" as a genre and has a notable impact on other fields of research, such as historiography, anthropology and ethnography. The films discussed in the second part of the thesis are coeval with a specific period in the history of image technology. It is important to note that these films are ten years apart, a decade in which the global political map shifts significantly, as does the technological landscape. I choose to contemplate them within one time frame because during the 1980s and 1990s television is a widespread means of communication that produces content at a frenetic pace. It is during these decades that the first 24-hour news broadcasting channels emerge – as well as 24-hour music channels, shopping channels, weather channels, etc. Also, during these two decades the domestic videocassette recorder is in widespread use in homes, despite the advent of competing technologies. These years also see the wide spread of camcorders directed to the domestic market; we see how they expand during the mid and second half of the 1980s and how new digital formats start to compete with them in the late 1990s. Leading to an overlap of obsolescence of video formats and emerging new technologies, which in turn might even have a shorter lifespan.

2.3.2. COMPILATION, FOUND FOOTAGE FILM, APPROPRIATION FILM

Above we have reflected on these films as documentaries and I would like to point out once again Hito Steyerl's idea that the core quality of the contemporary documentary mode as such is its uncertainty, as well as the questions which documentaries trigger, which are substantially different from those associated with fictional modes of filmmaking.[348] With this in mind, now I ask myself what happens when documentaries interrogate images of historical and political nature with the images themselves, through the images themselves? What happens when these images that are so easily recognizable are seen in a new light? My feeling is that they offer a counter-statement, a possibility for resistance, which instead of just imposing a new understanding opens a dialogue with the representation of the historical event and its means of representation. This kind of resistance does not necessarily lead to a negation of previous understandings, although it might, but prevents from taking "official" images and "official" discourses at face value, creating a space for complexity and contradiction.

Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* is often described as a documentary, but according to Jay Leyda it should be included in what he believed to be a genre in itself, that of *compilation film*, to which he dedicated his seminal book *Films Beget Films. Compilation Films from Propaganda to Drama*.[349] Leyda insisted on the use of *compilation*, instead of other terms such as "archive films", "stock-shot films", "documentary archive films" or "montage films", because he believed "The proper term would have to indicate that the *work begins on the cutting table*, with already existing film shots. It also has to indicate that the film used originated at some time in the *past*. The term could also indicate that it is a film of *idea*, for most of the films made in this form are not content to be mere records or documents."[350] He rules out the term "documentary", although he states that both documentary and compilation have an element in common: "the manipulation of actuality,"[351] paraphrasing Griersons famous expression.

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[348] Steyerl, Hito, "Documentary Uncertainty".
[349] Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films.*
[350] *Ibid.*, p. 9 Other authors attribute the creation of the term to filmmaker Paul Rotha, such as Barsam, Richard M. *Nonfiction Film. A Critical History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 391.
[351] Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, p. 10.

Films made with appropriated material have received many names over the years, but in general they have followed a conventional division between those that are classified as "compilation films," which are inscribed within, or related to, the field of documentary and nonfiction filmmaking; and those that fall under the banner of "found footage films," which are usually understood as part of artistic and experimental film practices. Antonio Weinrichter, in his exhaustive study on the matter has followed this division in the structure of his book, but admits that these categories at times are difficultly held apart. According to him, it is specifically challenging to maintain such division in the 1920s and in the last quarter of the 20th century, which are precisely the two periods addressed in this thesis.[352]

Paul Arthur, another author who has written extensively on found footage filmmaking, views two tendencies in the recycling of footage that initially were related but diverged after the Second World War as two separate non-mainstream practices. The first, involved European avant-garde artists of the 1920s and 1930s such as René Clair, Hans Richter or Walter Ruttman, who reworked found footage emphasizing previously ignored formal or metaphoric qualities, it is what he calls a method of "estrangement." The second was what he called a "politicized recalibration or inversion of scenes culled from 'official' newsreels and more marginal materials." He considers Shub, Vertov and Ivens as exponents of this tendency where he considers found footage is put to work as "a conduit of history."[353]

It might be helpful to see some of the main characteristics of compilation film and how different definitions of the terms compilation and found footage crisscross each other. In first place, the filmmaker behind a compilation film functions as both director and editor of the film, he or she can also be seen as a collector in a certain sense. Leyda hinted at this when he affirmed that the work of compilation started at the editing table. The editor does not work for a director adapting the montage to a story; the director-editor works with footage that has already been shot, and this footage is *the* story. Beattie speaks of "compilation documentary," and defines the "compilation filmmaker" as "a collector and editor who creates an object – a film or television programme – from a variety of so-called found footage."[354] One can speak of contemporary compilation forms in television and documentary films. Sobchack and

[352] Weinrichter, Antonio, *Metraje encontrado*.
[353] Arthur, Paul. "The Status of Found Footage." *Spectator* 20 no. 1 (Fall 1999/Winter 2000 1999): 57-69, p. 59.
[354] Beattie, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

Sobchack locate the compilation film within what they call an "analytic documentary." For them, compilation is defined by the fact that it is made solely of existing footage, they specifically emphasize the particularity that the director functions primarily as an editor. However their use of the term "compilation" is much more inclusive, maybe too inclusive, since they use it for newsreel, which they think is its most obvious presentation, as well as what they term "feature length compilation films." Even if they do point out one crucial difference between newsreel and compilation films: the fact that the selection of material for newsreel was determined as by its *ability to remain interesting*, despite the weekly intervals between issues, as well as by its actual importance.[355] Both the idea of "novelty" and "ability to remain interesting", as well as the idea that some current events are more important than others, would make us think of current television formats. Whereas compilation strives for something else, the lapse of time is what gives it great reflective power, which makes it a tool for addressing those same events in a critical manner. In fact, Leyda, when defining compilation as a genre, specifically states the need for the recordings of the events being compiled to have originated some time in the past. Newsreel, due to the requirement to remain current and rank high in the interest of the public, seems more distanced to the idea of documentary analysis. It does have a structuring, an ordering and it follows a hierarchical scale, but it responds to a highly formulated visual format and to a relatively fast consumption.[356] What is more, Leyda considers that compilation can only grow out of study and manipulation, and that in the preparation of the separate pieces that make up newsreel a consciousness of all their elements rarely plays a part.[357] He also reinforces this difference between newsreel and compilation when he writes "our compilation Machine offers itself for the communication of more abstract concepts than can be expected of the more habitual fiction film, more complex propaganda arguments than can be hoped of radio or newspaper - but only artistic imagination and skill bring

[355] Thomas Sobchack and Vivian C. Sobchack, op. cit., p. 355.
[356] "Key news events of national and international importance, incorporating footage often shot for other purposes (for example, battle footage), would begin the newsreel. This was followed by a lighter material, which almost always included some footage about women (such as a fashion show or bathing beauty contest) and finally sports. The selection of material was determined as much by its ability to remain interesting and news, despite the weekly intervals between issues, as by its actual importance. An analysis was supplied primarily by voice-over narration and secondarily by headline titles between segments." (Sobchack and Sobchack, *op. cit.*, p. 355). What they are calling analysis seems to be simple narration. The format is strikingly close to current news broadcasts.
[357] Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, p. 22

these bare newsreel actualities to the spectator in any way that will remain in his consciousness."[358]

What Leyda simply terms compilation, Sobchack and Sobchack term "feature length compilation film," which according to them, "through the juxtaposition of archival footage, attempts to analyze history through film records of events and people."[359] It implies that having history as its subject matter is one of the characteristics of the feature length compilation film. Although this might be open to debate, the fact that there is a time lapse or two times present in compilation films does somehow lend itself to some kind of reflection of the passage of time or revisionist view, even if the subject matter is not a historical event or figure. Sharon Sandusky goes as far as to speak of "the Archival Art Film," which according to her, "through the reincorporation of film fragments, demonstrates new possibilities of transformation. The recycling of images which were used before in entirely different contexts opens new vistas of exploration for human consciousness."[360]

For Stella Bruzzi, the compilation film is a documentary constructed almost exclusively out of retrieved archive, and signals Shub and Vertov as the pioneers. She also adds a political dimension that she dates back to these Soviet filmmakers, claiming that "the political approach to found footage," which uses archival material dialectically or "against the grain", where this derivation of the archive is a meaningful issue, has a long-standing history. Bruzzi speaks of Shub's compilation technique as an example of the tradition of dialectical, political filmmaking. According to her, since Shub's pro-Bolshevik film was largely dependent on antipathetic, pro-Tsarist material and it thereby exhibited the dependency upon dialectical collision between the inherent perspective of the original archive and its radical re-use that remains a characteristic of the compilation documentary.[361] However, more than a dialectic operation, or in that very dialectic operation, between the event (the last years of Tsarist regime and the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution) and its representation (the footage gathered by Shub), the latter comes to dominate over the former, it becomes its embodiment and source material for the study of the events portrayed. What Shub's film makes abundantly clear is that the images of the events retraced in *The Fall of the Romanovs*

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[358] Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, p. 10.
[359] Sobchack and Sobchack, *op. cit.,* p. 355.
[360] Sandusky, Sharon. "The Archaeology of Redemption: Toward Archival Film." *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 26 (Fall 1992 1992): 2-25, p. 3.
[361] Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

do not 'speak for themselves.' With her film, Shub both straightforwardly tells the story of the events leading up to the revolution and passes commentary on why it occurred, by severing archive material from its original context and offering a reinterpretation, effecting the inversion of its intentional meanings.[362]

Yann Beauvais also mentions a conceptual notion, an element of critique attached to the compilation practice. For Beauvais, since its inception, the compilation film "has served the twin interests of economic recycling –the creation of new product from old—and historical (re)interpretation: the filling in of lacunae caused by the absence of a camera at significant events or the recomposition of filmed events to suit specific political aims".[363] It is true that compilation came into being as the gathering of shots to cover events which had not been filmed, both Leyda and Weinrichter, among others, give several accounts of this use.[364] But there are other occasions when this idea of filling in of lacunae does not take such a literal meaning, in these occasions compilation can attempt to bridge a gap of understanding, of knowledge, or at least of signalling the difficulties of knowing "all the sides to a story," as in the case of *Videograms of a Revolution*, or the difficulty of elaborating independent thought when confronted with the bombardment of propagandistic images, such as in *The Atomic Cafe*.

It seems that the term "found footage" became the prevalent term, especially in the 1990s, engulfing all kinds of manifestations of recycling footage. The term "found footage" has been defined as an aesthetic method to which the extensive use, transformation and re-interpretation of other filmmakers' images is characteristic; the motivations for this use of footage and the ways of handling it are quite diverse.[365] However, this does not mean that there is necessarily a found footage aesthetic, according to Beauvais there does exists a genre of films which call upon filmic documents which the filmmakers have not recorded themselves under the term "found footage".[366] He sees two main tendencies in the cinema of found footage between filmmakers that specialize in the use of found footage (such as Bruce Conner) and filmmakers that use it punctually in their work as reflection on the cinematic code.

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[362] Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, p. 27
[363] Beauvais, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
[364] Leyda. *Films Beget Films*; Weinrichter, *Metraje encontrado*.
[365] Hausheer, Cecilia and Settele, Christoph ed. *Found Footage Film*. Freiburg: VIPER, 1992, p. 5.
[366] Beauvais, *op. cit.,* p. 25.

Perhaps the most specific classification of the ways footage is recycled is the one proposed by William C. Wees, who under the umbrella of found footage differentiates between the categories of *compilation*, *collage* and *appropriation*.[367] For him, a compilation film does not automatically question representation, which would depend on its methodology and reception. I agree with the idea that compilation as a method does not *per se* question representation, nor is recycling footage inherently analytical. However, we can make a distinction between compiling as a method (used for varied purposes by all kinds of moving image productions, from news reportage to music videos) and compilation as the genre defined by Leyda. Wees also believes that collage does provoke a self-conscious, creative, and critical viewing of cinematic representations. In his words, "the kinds of representation that compilation films tend to take for granted are precisely the kind collage films call into question."[368] So compilation would be conventional and collage would have a disruptive, questioning potential. In this sense, what Wees terms collage is very close to what Leyda understood as compilation. The last of Wees's three categories, appropriation, lacks the deconstructive strategies and critical point of view characteristic of collage films, and it differs from compilation because appropriated images are presented with little concern for their historical specificity, whereas in compilation films an archival shot is presumed to have concrete, historical referents that ground the film's discourse in reality.[369] This taxonomy seems terribly restrictive and does not take into account the complexities that cross over the different categories he establishes. And, what is more, it is contradicted by many of the statements of the directors he uses as examples, in the excerpts of conversations with them that he includes as the final chapter of the book.[370]

Who, in my view, best summarizes these issues and offers a complex understanding that incorporates new historicist ideas and Sobchack's phenomenological perspective is Jaime Baron, who contends that they all these forms of working with "found footage" are appropriations, and that the continuities between documentary and experimental appropriations are nebulous. She offers a "revised formulation" of what she calls the "appropriation film", which she defines as " a set of films that may produce

[367] For him Shub's film would be a compilation, Bruce Conner's *A Movie* would be a collage film and *The Atomic Café*, would be on the border of both methods. Wees, William C. *Recycled Images. The Art and Politics of Found Footage Film*. New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993, pp. 36-37.
[368] Wees, William C. "Found Footage and Questions of Representation." In *Found Footage Film*, edited by Cecilia Hausheer and Christoph Settele, 37-53. Freiburg: VIPER, 1992, p. 43
[369] Wees, *Recycled Images*, p. 40.
[370] Wees, "Speaking of Found Footage", in *Recycled Images*, pp. 65-99.

a particular *effect* or evoke a particular kind of *consciousness* in the viewer", distancing herself significantly from Wees' notion of "appropriation film" as pastiche. The effect she is referring to is what she calls "the archive effect", which is built on two constitutive experiences: a sense of "temporal disparity" and a sense of "intentional disparity."[371] She employs the term "appropriation film" as overarching category that includes a variety of media (film, video, digital media). She suggests we regard "foundness" as a constituent element of all archival documents as they are perceived in appropriation films. "Foundness" understood in opposition to documents produced by the filmmaker specifically for a given film. The "found" document becomes "archival" as it recontextualized within an appropriation film and is recognized by the viewer as "found." What makes footage read as "archival" is "temporal disparity," the perception by the viewer of a "then" and a "now" within a single text.[372] This understanding makes appropriation filmmaker, who draws on found documents, a reader and a user, and reminds us that images do not have definite meaning.[373]

2.3.3. AESTHETIC OF RUINS: FRAGMENTS AND WASTE

This idea of "foundness" as a common characteristic for the use of archival footage in appropriation films, also hints at a another characteristic of recycling footage: its fragmentary nature. In fact, Baron, speaks of metonymy rather than metaphor as the key trend in contemporary documentary's approach to history, moving away from the "transfer of meaning" or the attempt to explain history, toward a "transfer of presence" or a sense of contact with the historical past. Contrary to metaphor, the use of metonymy can be seen as a refusal to assert a stable narrative of the past, and in its stead offer an "experience" of the confrontation with the vast yet partial and discontinuous archive of materials that precedes any construction of historical understanding.[374]

Film and video themselves are archival devices; they are part of the storage technologies that can record and reproduce acoustic and optical data.[375] And because the camera is literally an archiving machine, every photograph, every film is *a priori* an

[371] Baron, *The Archive Effect*, p. 9-11.
[372] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
[373] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[374] Baron, Jaimie. "Contemporary Documentary Film and "Archive Fever": History, the Fragment, the Joke." *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 60 (Fall 2007): 13-24, p. 14.
[375] Kittler, *op. cit.*

archival object. The desire to make a photograph, to document an event, is related to the aspiration to produce a record.[376] However, while optical and sonic data in film are storable, they are also shadowy, fleeting. Film, due to its reproducibility, occupies a specific archival status; it contains a duality, as both collected and sequestered object, continuously circulating, it has a potential to be endlessly reclassified and reincorporated into new narrative structures. It "ensures that archival film retains an osmotic function: operating both internally and externally to any specific taxonomy".[377] Archival devices, such as film and video not only receive and inventory, but also collect possible transverse links between groups of data and between their own data and other fields. In so doing, they are capable, for example, not only of giving events a favourable reception and facilitating them, but can also endeavour to let them go beyond their self-defined boundaries, and lose themselves in the depths of the networks of connections.[378]

Photography and film mediate history and document, event and image. Media intervenes into the archive and public memory. What metonymy has to offer is a point of entry. The refusal of certain documentaries to come to any conclusive interpretations can be seen as a function of the metonymic role of the fragment.[379] Shub's film, in this sense, is quite different to the films seen in Part II of the thesis. Shub closes her discourse with conclusive interpretations. She does defend moving images as documents that transport past events, but in her approximation there is positivistic attitude. More than offering a point of entry to a complex episode of history, she offers a story that is perfectly glued together, and when using the footage that she does, subverting its original functions, she is performing an act of "revelation." This idea that there is one truth behind the images is what distances her the most from the films that are analysed in Part II.

It is my contention that the films that will be discussed in the second part of this thesis, *The Atomic Cafe* and *Videograms of a Revolution*, are an expression or symptom of the need for new ways to sort through the traces of the past. A need that was quite present in the 1980s and 1990s, and that is even more manifest today. As Baron agues,

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[376] Enwezor, Okwui. *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2008, p. 12

[377] Faiers, Jonathan. "Thawing." In *Potential: Ongoing Archive*, edited by Anna Harding. Amsterdam: Artimo, 2002, p. 71.

[378] De Baere, Bart. "Potentiality and Public Space. Archives as a Metaphor and Example for a Political Culture." In *Interarchive. Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field*, edited by Beatrice Von Bismark, Hans-Peter Feldman, Hans Ulrich Obris, Ulf Wuggenig and Diethelm Stoller, 108. Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002, pp. 108.

[379] Baron, Jaimie. 2007. "Contemporary Documentary Film", p. 23.

selecting and repurposing fragments is one strategy for navigating the excess and impermanence of the information age.[380] These appropriation films offer, among other things, a way of recycling the excess waste of consumer culture. Catherine Russell defines this practice as "an assembly of cultural detritus" and as "an investigation of the margins of the media" in which different footage is reviewed as "documents."[381]

Shub had had the insight to see documents of great value where others saw waste, however, what appropriation filmmakers encountered in the 1980s and 1990s was overwhelming. The contexts could not have been more different. Shub's labour was one of investigation and unearthing, of finding out what images had been made, where they were, and how to access them. The Archives Project and Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica also researched exhaustively but theirs was a labour of selection. They had to glean, scavenge, within piles of audiovisual rubble.

As we have seen above, Nicolas Bourriaud has argued that this recycling of cultural objects into new cultural objects that are once again put in circulation is a symptom of our time. For this kind of art production uses the term "postproduction."[382] However, I feel more partial to terms such as "scavenging" (taken from Emile de Antonio)[383] and "gleaning" (in reference to Agnès Varda).[384] All three terms have to do with appropriation, in one way or another; they have to do with issues of massive production, with excess, with refusal, and with property. But scavenging and gleaning make me think of resistance, of an open-ended search and of reflection. In them I see a questioning of value, as established by external forces, as well as self-building practice in so far as there is a positioning of one self, of choosing not to conform. Whereas postproduction slides more into an aesthetical condition, it might be more inclusive, but it can also produce a kind of flattening effect. Postproduction suggests a blurring between the acts of producing and consuming, but it also holds a tendency to be more fast-paced, more "devouring," less inclined to take into consideration differences. I regard *The Atomic Cafe* and *Videograms of a Revolution* as acts of scavenging, in the sense that they have to do with struggles, with resistance; and as acts of gleaning, which do not submit, at least not completely, to flows of commodification and curses of outmodedness. They embrace contradiction. Postproduction makes me thing of music

[380] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[381] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
[382] Bourriaud, *op. cit*.
[383] Weiner, Bernard. "Radical Scavenging: An Interview with Emile De Antonio." *Film Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Fall 1971 1971): 3-15.
[384] *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*, (Le glaneur et la glaneuse, Agnès Varda, 2000).

videos, which usually offer no commentary, no contradiction, just aesthetization.[385] All three terms reflect how we navigate our culture, but scavenging and gleaning hold an emphasis on reflection, on the act of searching, there is room for pause. Postproduction, on the other hand, almost lends itself to a "business as usual" kind of attitude. Bourriaud applies his notion of postproduction to works of art produced since the 1990s that have found success within the art market, which again returns us to official stances and hierarchies. He speaks of works that might be critical in intention but that are again "devoured."

The films I write about are not immune, they could also be "devoured" and flattened out in new repurposings. But so far, in their trajectory they have worked differently, even when they have been exhibited in museums and galleries. Some of them have had more distribution than others, it would not be accurate to say they are obscure, but they do not "fit in" practically anywhere. They are films that are rarely shown in cinemas, which would be their expected site, except as part of a very specific cycle in a film festival. They are shown or taught in certain university programmes, of fields such as from contemporary art history, visual cultures, and communication studies. They seem to never "come home," they seem to rest better as references in books, as instruments for thought, than on big screens or even little ones for that matter, finding a video or DVD edition of them is not impossible, but is not that easy. They are most likely found in the second hand market and most easily accessed by pear 2 pear sharing and specialized streaming portals that focus on experimental and artistic films. Sometimes they can be found in the catalogues of independent cultural organization as works that may be rented by institutions. They are erratic in that sense, they have to be looked for, it is uncommon to just bump into them.

Bourriaud, also speaks of "counterimage" and a moral position for denouncing, but in his book I see an homogenizing effect, he recurs to "*détourment,*" but I find his conclusions unsatisfactory. Both Varda and De Antonio, with their terms, make room for particularities, for bizarreness, unresoluteness, questioning and, most importantly, pause. It is as if these filmmakers side with the poor and the outcasts, with what has become old and uninteresting, i.e. waste.

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[385] An example of contemporary use of Cold War era material ina superficial and aesthetical way can be seen in the music video to the song "Pump Up the Volume" by M/A/R/R/S, 1987. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9gOQgfPW4Y

The idea of remains, of ruins, of waste, is fundamentally volatile when dealt with as an epistemic category. It has to do with what has fallen by the wayside, with what has been left out, and precisely because it has been left out, either purposefully outcast or simply ignored, it can hold unforeseen value; these rejected "things" are fluid as well as opaque and resistant to fixity.[386] But waste can undergo a transformation, from simple rubbish to a new kind of object, and thus become valuable once again. David Gross, when speaking of objects of the past, follows Benjamin in the idea that waste "gives a glimpse of something that shoots beyond the past as such and calls out to be recognized and responded to in the present."[387] On the other hand, waste is permanent and unavoidable in the sense that there is no system that does not produce remains, scraps, or leftovers; there is no system that does not leave certain parts to decay, that does not secrete or reject. But waste is also "unstable and evanescent, because waste is not meant to remain or perdure. It is but a category of transition, a limit-category."[388] It is located somewhere between value and devaluation, between memory and forgetting. This brings to mind Benjamin's claim that historical thought must involve the overcoming of the opposition between progress and decadence, which he argued was a product of the system of representation itself, a system that separated "productive," "forward-looking," from "retrograde," "obsolescent." What was required, according to him, was a "displacement of angle of vision," where the negative component would be subjected to the evaluation of critique and revised in the tension between value and non-value.[389]

Whether waste is transversal, shooting from the past to the present or it is a limit between one value and another, what seems clear is that it is only conceivable within a process, a transition, a movement. In order for an object to become waste, it has to be discarded, that is emptied of its use or economical value. When this happens as an effect of the passage of time, the object from the past that has been degraded not only points to that past, but to a process of transforming material composites into waste, this is a process in which decomposition is a constitutive factor.

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[386] Neville and Villeneuve, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.
[387] Gross, David. "Objects from the Past." In *Waste-Site Stories: The Recycling of Memory*, edited by Brian Neville and Johanne Villeneuve, 29-37. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, p. 34.
[388] Moser, Walter. "The Acculturation of Waste." In *Waste-Site Stories: The Recycling of Memory*, edited by Brian Neville and Johanne Villeneuve, 85-105. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, p. 102
[389] Neville and Villeneuve, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

For Catherine Russell, found footage filmmaking is fundamentally "an aesthetic of ruins." Its "intertextuality" can also be seen as an allegory of history, "a montage of memory traces by which the filmmaker engages with the past through recall, retrieval, and recycling."[390] Works that experiment with the documentary status of the archival images evoke alternative and dialectical forms of temporality and history. She states, "Recycling found images implies a profound sense of the already-seen, the already-happened, creating a spectator position that is necessarily historical."[391] So a lot rides on the experience of the spectator, which leads to an interesting paradox: on the one hand, documentary can be understood as an experience more than just a cinematic object (as defended by Sobchack) and the appropriation film a specific experience that Baron has termed the "archive effect"; and, on the other hand, a lot has been written about the destruction of experience. Neville and Villeneuve argue that we live amid the decay of structures that once organized our collective and individual experience (political orders, criteria of value, categories of judgment, traditions).[392] This is something that Benjamin starting accounting for as an outcome of the First World War. Following his lead, Agamben has written of the "destruction" or "expropriation" of experience. Neville and Villeneuve argue that it would seem that "life is what remains, what leaves traces amid the ruins of experience, and it is precisely this concept of remains that can provide a new paradigm for questioning culture today."[393]

Agamben argued that experience is no longer accessible to us because events have become "non-translatable into experience."[394] Not that there are no more experiences, but they are enacted outside the individual, who can only observe them. Does this have to do with the externalization of certain experiences due to technological achievements that Doane has observed? How does it relate to it? Have the experiences been eroded because of the emergence and development of recording devices or are the products of these recording devices addressing a phenomenological void?

According to Agambem, part of the destruction of experience has to do with his belief that to experience something means divesting it of novelty, since the new cannot be experienced because it is in the depths of the unknown. However, he recurs to Baudelaire's aspiration to create a "common place," which could be created by

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[390] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
[391] *Ibid.*, p. 241
[392] Neville and Villeneuve, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[393] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[394] Agamben, Giorgio. *Infancy and History. The Destruction of Experience*. London and New York: Verso, 2007, pp. 16-17.

accumulation of experience, but not by one individual. According to Agamben, in a state where man has been expropriated of experience, the creation of a common place is possible only through a destruction of experience, which is really man's new abode.[395] Is this what these films are addressing? Taking images that are no longer novel, that represent events that are no longer news, that, in fact, are part of an audiovisual background that has become imperceptible because it is completely assumed and unstoppable? There is a re-addressing, there is an act of construction over something that has already been (it is part of the past, and most viewers have probably seen many of those images before), there is something at play in the tension between what is familiar and yet not really known.

It might be necessary to go back to Benjamin to deal with this idea not being able to translate events into experience, this confrontation with the unknown. For Benajmin, this loss of experience had to do with the outcome of the First World War, which left a gap between culture and experience. In his thought, experience was predicated on continuity, on "the individuals capacity to bring events in line with forms of the past, to reduce the shock of the new by calling upon the authority of tradition."[396] In his words, "never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience of inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn streetcar after the Great War stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body."[397]

Benjamin recurs to the figure of the storyteller, the person who travelled and brought back experiences (both his or her own and the ones he or she had listened to); or the person who had not left home at all and knew, and recounted, everything there was to know about the locality and its people.[398] There is an act of accumulating and making ones own the stories of many, and an act of passing on. It is an oral tradition, the "storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others.

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[395] *Ibid.*, p. 47-48
[396] Neville and Villeneuve, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[397] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," p. 84.
[398] *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale."[399] He distinguishes it from the novel and the press, the first is a solitary labour, and it neither comes from the oral tradition nor goes back to it. The latter is a form of communication based on information, and the prime requirement of information is that it must appear "understandable in itself." The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new, while a story preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it a long time after.[400] In these films what was once information in Deleuze's sense (behaviour instructions),[401] becomes accumulated ruins, out-dated but telling. Wees argues that recycled images invite self-reflection, something that is not within the aims of information (this is not to say that information forbids or disables analytical thought, it just is not its purpose). Russell shares this point of view, for her "The techniques of appropriation, recycling, and re-presentation place the status of the past, the history of the referent, in question,"[402] reusing film fragments exposes the dangerous engineering and manipulation that it might have had in its original context.[403]

[399] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[400] *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.
[401] Deleuze, Gilles. "Having an Idea in Cinema (on the Cinema of Straub-Huillet)." In *Deleuze & Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, edited by Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller, 14-19. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 18.
[402] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
[403] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

2.4. WEAVING IMAGES INTO ESSAYS

2.4.1. INTRODUCTION

The essay film is one of the possible tools to address the need to interrogate images, both as representation of events and in themselves, as well as the systems that produce them. The essay film is most commonly regarded as a mode of filmmaking pertaining to the arena of non-fiction, and at the same time as a practice that has little to do with, or that offers an alternative to, "documentary". But, as has been seen in the previous pages, documentary as a category is problematic, its relation or distance to the essay film would depend largely on the understanding of documentary. So far I have dealt with the films in this thesis as documentaries and as appropriated films, not because I am intent on classifying them, but because I am attempting (essaying, if you will) to see *how* these films could be addressed as documentaries, appropriated films and, now, essay films; and what knowledge can we get from looking through these three prisms, which hold complex relations to each other.

The recycling and repurposing of images holds complex dynamics with the essayistic in film. I am especially interested in this dynamic when the appropriated footage is put to work as a conduit of history and is addressed from a subjective, personal perspective, that is, with an admittedly limited and self-conscious perspective, which is not to say lacking argumentation or commitment to critical thinking. Much of this material is easily seen as visual remains, waste, "old news." However, we cannot afford to disregard our castoffs.[404] It is in this sense that the essay can play an important role. There is not *one correct* way to approach the visual remains of our past. It is most likely that each essayist will need to find his or her way to address each trace, each historical event, bringing out his or her own conclusions, which are not treated as truths beyond a doubt. The essay can afford to let questions linger, let them remain unanswered, which is not to say unaddressed. The essay takes the shape of a prolonged, even interrupted, dialogue instead of a lecture or a lesson. Essay films offer a dialogue, in the sense that they respond to something previous and leave their production open to further debate and questioning. An essay film is but a part of an on-going chain. It offers temporal approaches that show contradiction and fragmentariness, which are not

[404] Neville and Villeneuve, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

smoothed over; in fact, the essay is a platform that is built on that very contradiction and fragmentariness.

It has been said that the essay film is a mode within the terrain of nonfiction filmmaking, also that it is related to experimental cinema, however it is different to broad models of documentary or experimental cinema, the essay makes a *critical intervention* in the history of cinema. The essay film takes place in the encounter between the self and the public domain, it renegotiates assumptions, it crosses boundaries. The essayist reacts to a number of utterances, stimuli and influences. What is more, the essay film does not create new forms of experimentation, realism, or narrative; it rethinks existing ones as a dialogue of ideas. The essay explores a thing from many sides without wholly encompassing it.

In the essay film hierarchy is disregarded on many levels. The voice is not the voice-of-God narration, in fact, in many essay films in addition to the subjective voice of the author, within the film many voices from many provenances can be heard, these complement and contradict the voice that is sharing its reflections. Even if there is only one narrator, it does not take the high-standing position of someone who knows all in advance, it is a voice that questions, that doubts, that shares its thoughts. In the essay film there is also a tearing down of genres, it is an "in-between" mode of filmmaking (between fiction and documentary; between art and experiment; between speculative discourse and first person narration). The topic is free, the way it is addressed is free, and it is not uncommon to find essays addressing historical events by engaging with might seem "side-stories."

Experience is fundamental in critical approaches to cinema. The essay film is experience based in more than one sense. In first place, it stems from a subjective reflection; the author tries to write/show what he or she thinks of something happening in the world surrounding him or her, which includes the world of images, which are increasingly important in our knowledge about current and historical events. In second place, the essay is directed to an embodied spectator, not a faceless audience, but an embodied spectator who must build the meaning of what he or she is seeing. The essay demands a lot of the spectator, who must arrive to his or her own conclusions and is invited to continue the dialogue.

For David Montero the key characteristic of the cinematic essay is that it proceeds in a dialogic manner, contrary to the view which presents it as a subjective monologue,

he finds the essay's foundations in an interpersonal meditation, which mobilizes a number of voices in its exploration. On the one hand, the essay is a sort of inner speech where the threads used by the essayist in his or her meditation are laid out in full view and, on the other hand, it offers these threads to the viewer who can use them as his or her own experience. All this gives shape to the human activity of conceptualizing what we experience, using what we know.[405]

2.4.2. THE LITERARY PRECEDENT

Montaigne is credited as the creator of the essay and, hence, he has become the mandatory reference when trying to figure out what exactly constitutes an essay. It was Montaigne who termed this kind of reflective writing "essai". A term that expresses the provisional nature of his thoughts, the fact that they are attempts, tries, tests. Both Luckács and Adorno, defend that "The simple modesty of this word is an arrogant courtesy."[406] Whatever it was, it was a conscious choice and an eloquent one. His endeavour was a personal test to know the deepness of his being in all its complexity and with what must be done in each instant, always in construction, never definitive. It was an attempt at something new; the word carries with it the idea of constant replacement and renovation, meaning that he was to put his ever-changing self under continuous scrutiny; he was to be immersed in a constant learning process.[407] Montaigne offers views of, comments on, judgements of a plethora of common and uncommon questions. They describe a bond between a personal life and the surrounding events, "they testify not only to the constant change and adjustments of a mind as it defers to experience but also to the transformation of the essayistic self as part of that process."[408] The new literary space that Montaigne inaugurated is located somewhere between speculative discourse and autobiographical discourse, without conforming to either the philosophical treatise or the autobiography. In this in-betweeness, among

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[405] Montero, David. *Thinking Images. The Essay Film as a Dialogic Form in European Cinema*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2012, p. 4.
[406] Lukács, Georg. "On the Nature and Form of the Essay." In *Soul and Form*, 1-18. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Merlin Press Ltd, 1974, p. 9; Adorno, Theodor W. "The Essay as Form." *New German Critique*, no. 32 (Spring-Summer 1984 1984): 151-71, p. 157.
[407] Picazo, María Dolores. "Introducción." In *Michel De Montaigne Ensayos* 9-32. Madrid: Cátedra, 2008, pp. 25-26.
[408] Corrigan, Timothy. *The Essay Film from Montaigne, after Marker*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 13.

other things, Montaigne is demonstrating his scepticism towards the power of reason and renouncing its dogmatism, opting instead for ambiguity and the fluctuating possibilities of an "I."[409]

During the 18th and 19th century that the essay begins to take a more distinctive shape as a public dialogue between a self and a visible world.[410] What seems to remain a constant feature of the essay is that it always seems to be on the vanguard of thought, taking the pulse of what is happening through the eyes of those risk takers, exhibitionists and thinkers which are the essayists. From Addison to Orwell and Virginia Wolf; from Emerson and Thoreau to Didion and Sontag; and from Nietzsche to Benjamin, Sartre and Barthes.

The essay can be seen as a journey towards an unknown destination, the arrival is uncertain, the arrival is the essayist him or herself, which is also uncertain (because she or he is ever changing). There are experiences that cannot be expressed by any gesture and yet they long for expression; experiences of intellectuality, conceptuality as sensed experience as immediate reality.[411] The essay refuses to behave as if it had exhausted the topic. "It thinks in fragments just as reality is fragmented and gains its unity only by moving through the fissures, rather than by smoothing them over."[412] The essay does not *have to* stop where it does, Montaigne could have continued many of his essays, none were self-evidently finalized. Adorno, maintains something similar by saying the opposite: the essay can break off at any moment.[413]

The longing for, and impossibility of, transferring a personal experience, which also expresses a hope or an urge, might be why Montainge's term, "*essai*", is so pertinent. It follows an external provocation, the outside world stirs something in the essayist and, in turn, the essayist feels the desire to reflect on this and share his reflections. Thus, reaching others who, in turn, might feel stimulated to leave a trace of their own untranslatable process. It is a traveling of a road that is always there, but that is never the same. For Lukács the essay generally speaks of pictures, books, ideas, which act like springboards. And for this reason, he defends, every essay's title could be

[409] Picazo, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.
[410] Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[411] Lukács, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[412] Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
[413] *Ibid.*, p. 161

preceded by the words "thoughts occasioned by;" the essayist creates his or her judgement values from within him or herself, but it is awakened by something before.[414] Just as Lukács, Adorno argues that the essay is always concerned with something already formed or with something that has been; it does not draw something new out of an empty vacuum, it gives new order to such things as once lived.[415] This speculative investigation of specific, culturally preformed objects is what gives the essay its defining feature, according to Adorno, that is that the essay is a hybrid.

In the essay, what we find is understanding as unwrapping.[416] The essay tracks the person's thoughts as he or she tries to work out a mental knot; it is a search to find out what one thinks about something.[417] In this sense it is not only the unwrapping of a question, but the unwrapping of the essayist as well. The outcome is not predetermined and might possibly not be able to give an answer to the initial question that move the writer to essay. The essay can calmly set its fragmentariness against the "petty" completeness" of scientific exactitude. For Lukács, its longing is more than waiting for fulfilment, it is "an original and deeprooted attitude towards the whole of life."[418] The essayist writes essays, but these essays make the essayist who she or he is. In Montaigne we find a fluctuation between the study of himself and the scrutiny of his literary activity, which come to be the same thing.[419]

In Montaigne, "essay" refers to his will to exist in the provisional of his being. The essay translates his existential trajectory, but also the trajectory of writing, the existence in writing.[420] Montaigne's scepticism towards the power of reason, his rejection of its dogmatism, opting for ambiguity and fluctuation, remains at the heart of the essay. The ideals of purity and cleanliness bear the marks of a repressive order; the essay has room for faults and contradictions. Instead of "eternal values", it arrives at "little acts of knowledge," experience gives depth to its observations.[421] The essay does not obey the rules of organized science and theory. It does not strive for closed

[414] Lukács, *op. cit.*, p. 15-16.
[415] Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
[416] *Ibid.*, p. 152.
[417] Lopate, Phillip. "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film." *The Threepenny Review*, no. 48 (Winter 1992 1992): 19-22, p. 19.
[418] Lukács, *op. cit.*, p.17.
[419] Picazo, *op. cit.,* pp. 24-25.
[420] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[421] Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

construction, "The essay shies away from the violence of dogma."[422] One common and usual reproach that the essay encounters is that it is accused of being fragmentary and random. The essay suspends the traditional concept of method. It takes the anti-systematic impulse into its own procedure, and introduces concepts as it receives them. The essay remains sceptical and draws on itself the reproach that it does not know beyond a doubt just what is to be understood as the real content of concepts. In the essay "thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet."[423]

The essay is a judgement, however, what is essential about it is not the verdict but the process of judging.[424] The essay comes to no final conclusions, but it is not arbitrary.[425] It proceeds methodically unmethodically. It is open intellectual experience, there is a lack of security, it becomes true in its progress, which drives it beyond itself. It does not reach a point of legitimation. The essay insists that a matter be considered, from the very first, in its whole complexity. [426]

It is the critical form *par excellence*, it is the critique of ideology, "the essay, unlike discoursive thought, does not proceed blindly, automatically, but at every moment it must reflect of itself."[427] It must reflect on its relation to established thought and on its relation to rhetoric and communication. The law of the essay is heresy.[428] This hybridity is already present in Montaigne's *Essays*, which took part of a speculative discourse and of an autobiographical discourse. Its main difference with autobiographical writing is the alternation of narrative segments, with others that are reflexive and descriptive. Thus, he does not proceed chronologically, but analytically. In his analysis there is a will let himself go adrift, digress, this renouncing of systematic order and unity is less unconscious than what might seem at first glance. Montaigne avoids an objective coherence, but he does so in order to submit to a different coherence, to the logic of subjectivity.[429]

Aldous Huxley describes the essay as a "literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything," which moves among three poles. The first would be the pole of the personal, the autobiographical; the second, the pole of the objective, the

[422] *Ibid.*, p. 158.
[423] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
[424] Lukács, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[425] Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
[426] *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.
[427] *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162
[428] *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.
[429] Picazo, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

factual, the concrete particular; and the third, the pole of the abstract-universal. And while noting that some essays tend lean towards one pole or another, for him the most satisfying essays are those that make the best of all three worlds.[430] These poles are interactive and intersecting registers, which can also be helpful to think of the essay film. The essay film is an intersecting activity of personal expression, public experience, and the process of thinking, "the interactivity of these three dimensions creates a defining representational shape that emerges from the literary heritage of the essay and extends and reformulates itself in the second half of the twentieth century as the essay film."[431]

2.4.3. EARLY THEORETICAL NOTIONS REGARDING THE ESSAY FILM

What the essay film "proper" entails, is up for grabs. In fact, one of the virtues of the essay film is that there seems to be no "proper" formula, mode, system, content or shape. It is, like its literary counterpart, free and varied and ever surprising. That is not to say that anything can be an essay, but that an essay can take practically any form to address practically any topic, at almost any length the essayist deems fit to express his or her thoughts, in a manner that preserves the very process of reflection and extends an invitation to its reader by refusing a closed and final verdict of judgement. Due to the difficulty in defining the essay film it might be helpful to recur to some of the most influential texts on the topic.

Hans Richter commonly credited as the first person to use the term "essay film," however, the first written mention of "essay film" as concept can be found in Eisenstein's diaries, in his "Notes for a film of *Capital*," from 1927-1928. In these notes he explains that the future of cinema will have to do with philosophy, which was what he aimed at with the adaptation of Marx's *Das Kapital*. He also mentions that the seed of all this could be seen in his film *October* (1928), which he defines as "a collection of essays on a series of themes". He refers consistently to two sequences, which he uses as examples of what he defined as "intellectual montage", aiming to provoke a cerebral rather than an emotional impression on the viewer, the idea in his words is to go from

[430] Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Rascaroli, Laura. *The Personal Camera. Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*. London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2009, p. 23.
[431] Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

"given cases to ideas."[432] I would like to point out that *October* was the first film Eisenstein made after Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*. During the production of the later Eisenstein went many times to Shub's editing room, so much so that Shub had the impression that he reconstructed the sequence of the July revolt in Leningrad in *October* directly under the impression of what he saw while viewing the old footage with her. Shub also visited Leningrad, observing Eisenstein's shooting of *October* and discussing the montage structure of specific sequences with him and his assistant Alexandrov.[433] At that time, in those precise years 1927-1928 Eisenstein and Shub were in direct and frequent contact. Shub too wanted to create a lasting and impressing effect on the spectators of her film. She subjected the images to a theme, she thought them through and articulated them in a way that images commented on each other. In this sense Shub's film did have some kind of essayistic aspiration, which she shared with her close friend and peer Sergei Eisenstein, whose words I find are also descriptive of Shub's intentions with her historical compilations.

Hans Richter used the term "essay film" to refer to a genre of film that enables the director to make problems, thoughts, even ideas, perceptible and render visible what is not visible.[434] For Richter it is a category of documentary that addresses complex issues, which must try to show the idea, to visibilize intellectual concepts.[435] He chooses the word "essay" for this form of film since, for him, in literature "essay" implies the treatment of difficult topics in a way that is understandable to all. He also speaks of films that force the spectator to participate, to think, and feel. In the effort to make visible the invisible world of thoughts and ideas, the essay film can use a larger source of expressive material than regular documentary films. For him, the essay film is not bound to the reproduction of external appearances nor chronological sequence; it can use material form different origins.[436]

Another crucial text for the conception of essay film would be Alexandre Astruc's "Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo" published in 1948.[437] The author speaks of a transformation that is taking place and that he sees in the films of filmmakers such as Renoir, Welles and Bresson. For Astruc, cinema is gradually becoming a language, a

[432] David Montero, *op. Cit.*, pp. 29-30.
[433] Petric, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[434] Alter, Nora M. *Chris Marker*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006, p. 17.
[435] Richter, Hans. "El Ensayo Fílmico. Una Nueva Forma De La Película Documental." In *La Forma Que Piensa. Tentativas En Torno Al Cine-Ensayo*, edited by Antonio Weinrichter, 186-89. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2007, pp. 187-188.
[436] *Ibid*., p. 188.
[437] Astruc, *op. cit.*

form in which and by which an artist can express his (or her) thoughts however abstract they may be. He calls this the age of the *caméra-stylo*, and in this age he argues "the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language."[438] He defends that the camera writes, and not just illustrates, and that the fundamental problem of the cinema is how to express thought. The scriptwriter disappears, the author and the director are one and the same, direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a "true act of writing." The filmmaker/author writes with his camera.[439]

What is important to single out in Astruc's notion is that a film has to be *read*, it is neither an adaptation nor an illustration, it holds its own ground; and there is an effort to be made by the spectator. However, his notion of the camera as a pen is hard to defend. As Phillip Lopate has written "the camera is not a pencil, and it is rather difficult to think with it in the way an essayist might.[440] One does not translate thoughts in the same manner with one and the other. However, Montero defends that the parallelism established by Astruc, contrary to what it may appear at first sight, attempts to reinforce the specificity of cinema as an expressive medium and that the relation between writing and cinema should be understood as one of equivalence. For Montero this association "signals the end of the prelapsarian conception of cinema as the so-called 'language of the real'," and it "foregrounds the role of the filmmaker as enunciator of a subjective discourse." All this leads to the shifting of the source of meaning from a direct representation of the events that take place in the film to what the filmmaker is saying through it.[441]

Let us hold on to Astruc's idea of "filmed philosophy," which is related to Leyda's "film of *idea*," as a point of entry into this complex terrain of the essayistic in film. Leyda in his definition of "compilation film," specifically as he applied it to Shub, hits on something very important: that the term could also indicate that it is a film of *idea*.[442] Actually, this is a longstanding aspiration of the documentary tradition, as well as many avant-garde and fiction filmmakers. According to Leyda compilation offers

[438] *Ibid.*
[439] *Ibid.*
[440] Phillip Lopate, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[441] Montero, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[442] Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, p. 9 Other authors attribute the creation of the term to filmmaker Paul Rotha, such as Barsam, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

itself for the communication of more abstract concepts than can be expected of the more habitual fiction film, more complex propaganda arguments then can be hoped of radio or newspaper—but only artistic imagination and skill bring this bare newsreel actualities to the spectator in any way that will remain in his consciousness.[443]

For Leyda, Shub is not an anecdotal filmmaker, for him, her film inaugurates a new and complex genre, compilation. I do not intend to equate compilation to essay film, as has been pointed out, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* cannot be unproblematically deemed an essay film. However, there are certain aspects of the film that align it with some of the more interesting features of essay films. In first place, the difficulty one encounters when trying to classify Shub's work. Hagener attributes to her the merit of tearing down traditional categories with her trilogy, and goes as far as calling it an "extended historical essay."[444] Which is not surprising in the sense that one feature of the essay that can be agreed upon is that it challenges traditional categories. One thing is certain, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* does give the sense that Shub did "assay," "weigh," and contrast images in an experimental manner. She herself defended that the "emphasis on the fact is an emphasis not only to show the fact, but to enable it to be examined and, having examined it, to be kept in mind."[445] She brought together contradictory methods to write history with images, both taking from documentary or factual filmmaking (Vertov's compilation) and from fiction (Eisenstein's "montage of attractions"), giving it her unique touch, a falsely invisible hand. This "inbetweenness" or hybridity, as we shall see in the following pages, is another characteristic of the essayistic in film.

Her work could be described as holding an essayistic element in the sense that she thinks with the images. However, in her film we do not follow her process of thought, she does not share her doubts or questions, what we receive is her conclusion, an ordered narration of a succession of events. The leaps and guesses and synthesis that take place are neatly brushed over instead of addressed.

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[443] Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, p. 10
[444] Hagener, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
[445] Esfir Shub quoted in Malitsky, *op. cit.*

2.4.4. EARLY ESSAY FILMS

As for the actual production of essay films, different authors defend different starting points. Some authors point to certain films from the 1920s and 1930s by experimental artists and filmmakers. Others see a clear starting point in the mid 1950s, when the very term "essai cinematographic" was in frequent use in France to express how the filmmaker is not bound to the rules and parameters of traditional documentary.[446] Others, such as Corrigan and Alter, defend that the essay film "proper" does not make an appearance until the 1980s.[447] This points to three very interesting moments for the development of the essay in film: the 1920s-1930s within avant-garde circles, the 1950s in France, and the 1980s-1990s, which is basically what this thesis is centred on and seen in depth in the second section. By singling out these three moments I am not claiming that they are the only or most important time periods in the creation of essay films. However, I find them particularly interesting due to certain seminal films and the fact that they correspond with very complex historical and technological shifts.

The decades of the 1920s and 1930s, which are the years between the two World Wars, are a time of great filmic experimentation. It is only fitting that one of the key figures in the theoretical definition of "essay film", Hans Richter, was a filmmaker who strove to direct films in that vein. His film *Inflation* (1928) began a series of films that would lead him to define such a mode, the essay film, in his 1940 article. He recurred in part to stock-short libraries, and for this reason Leyda includes him, together with Shub, as a pioneering compilation filmmaker.[448] *Inflation* was Richter's first work addressing a social-political subject and for that very reason what was primordial was that the audience understood the idea behind the film.[449] The theme was reduced to its bare elements, contrasting numerical figures to represent the increasing inflation, paper money against a black backdrop and the figures of a wealthy man and a man impoverished in seconds.

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[446] Alter, *Chris Marker*, p. 17.
[447] Weinrichter, Antonio "Un Concepto Fugitivo. Notas Sobre El Film-Ensayo." In *La Forma Que Piensa. Tentativas En Torno Al Cine-Ensayo*, edited by Antonio Weinrichter, 18-48. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2007, p. 20.
[448] Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, p. 30.
[449] Von Hofacker, Marion. "Richter's Films and the Role of the Radical Artist, 1927-1941." In *Hans Richter. Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde*, edited by Stephen C. Foster, 122-59. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2000, p. 129.

Other authors, such as Corrigan, single out Jean Vigo's *A propos de Nice* (1930) and Luis Buñuel's *Land Without Bread* (1933) as experimental documentaries and clear precursors to the essay film.[450] For Montero they are more than mere antecedents, they mark the emergence of a new, politically committed version of the cinematic essay. Within this group of innovative and political films he also includes Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929).[451] It would be fair to say that the Russian film production of the 1920s plays an important role in the development of the essay film. As we have seen, Eisenstein aimed at producing essay films and was the first person to use the term, but, among the soviet films of the time, it has been Dziga's Vertov's *Man With Movie Camera* the one which has been most closely associated to the essay. Quite possibly because of the strong impression he had on Chris Marker, who has come to be known as the film essayist par excellence, and Jean-Luc Godard, who even named his revolutionary film collective The Vertov Group. Montero views Vertov's production as an essay film for several reasons. First, because for him it represents an attempt at understanding how film and reality interact. Second, because the act of comparing images is a central aspect of the film. And, in last place, because the non-fiction film images are used as elements that generate intellectual reflection. The treatment the images receive is not that of self-explanatory components of cinematic discourse, but as sites of contentions. All of which results in a film that is quite demanding of the spectator.[452] Shub is once again left out of the discussion.

In the 1950s in France, during the post war years the influence of the Cinémateque Francais plays an essential role in how film was to be thought and produced. It became the most important product of the cine club tradition and ushered in changes and new directions in the spectatorial dynamics of these clubs. For Corrigan, these changes would provide the defining structure of essayistic cinema, in the sense that the cine clubs would "stage and inhabit the possibility to rethink any film practice according in the formation of spectatorial formations that would come to define the essay film then and in the future."[453] Paul Arthur views crucial milestones in certain French films of those years. He singles out Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* (1955), Chris Marker's *Letter from Siberia* (1958), and Jean Rouch's *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955).

[450] Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[451] Montero, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
[452] *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.
[453] Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

After which, during the 1960s, "the essay gathered speed through the Seventies before bursting into a recognizable international phenomenon in the last 20 years."[454] One of the most interesting features in Marker's essays is what Lopate has termed a "pronounced time-lag between the quick eye and the slow, digesting mind."[455] That might very well be one of the key functions of the essay film in general, and that might very well be why appropriation films seem to have within them a great potential for the essayistic. In fact, this is relatable to one of the two essential conditions that Baron requires of the "archive effect": temporal disparity. Arthur speaks of the essays ability to blend several time frames, to segue between styles, tones and modes of address. But this blending does not erase the contrast between times. That is precisely the space where the essayistic comes into action, in that gap, in that distance that is uniquely travelled by the essayist. What is essential in this is covering angles of inquiry rather than historical nostalgia or pastiche. Essay films are commonly infused with found footage but *resist the urge to fetishize images from the past,* they "gnaw at the truth value, cultural contexts, or interpretative possibilities of extant images".[456]

I would like to take the chance to focus, even if it is just for a couple of pages, on Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955), a truly extraordinary film. According to Paul Arthur, after the Holocaust essay films acquire a distinct aesthetic outline and moral purpose,[457] this is undoubtedly the case of *Night and Fog* (1955). The poet Jean Cayrol, a survivor of Mauthausen himself, wrote the text and Alain Resnais, who had already filmed the documentary short *Statues Also Die* (1953), which dealt with issues regarding memory, history and the devastating effects of colonialism, directed it.

Night and Fog intertwines two very different sets of images that represent two different temporalities. The first are images in colour shot in 1955 (the present at the time) that show the concentration camp of Auschwitz in its current state: empty of prisoners, of bodies, of people, where the grass grows in tranquillity. The second are images in black and white, archival images of the past, starting with images form the 1930s showing the rise of Nazism, images of the camps being built, being filled and the daily lives of those who lived and died in them, up until the Allies' "clean-up" after the

[454] Arthur, Paul. "Essay Questions." *Film Comment* 39 no. 1 (January-February 2003 2003): 53-62, p. 59.
[455] Lopate, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[456] Arthur, "Essay Questions", p. 59. It is important to point out that Arthur uses *The Atomic Cafe* as a negative example, as a film that celebrates the existence of vintage footage, which disqualifies it as an essay film. I disagree on this reading of the film, as shall be seen in the chapter dedicated to *The Atomic Cafe*.
[457] Paul Arthur, "Essay Question", p. 61.

liberation. The text, the images and the music composed by Hanns Eisler, build a tentative, elusive story. One question is constant: Can this be represented? Can it be told? Is it not indescribable? A point that is made specific when we hear the narrator says: "What hope do we really have of capturing this reality?" One is tempted to say no, yet there is a need to approach that which cannot be transmitted, translated. This is the longing of the essay, trying to make visible the invisible, trying to address that which seems impossible of representing, but that is essential to not leave unaddressed. It approaches the subject matter from many sides, not exhausting them all, but giving points of entry, even if it is to let us know of the many practical processes that led to what happened there, of its build up. It might not paint a complete picture, but that is not the purpose, what is essential is that it gives us the tools to think, to not be blocked by the horror of what we see and hear, to dismantle something so evil, so shocking.

The film shows us the designs for the camps, the different models for the watching towers, the voice-over explains the several phases such constructions go through, just like any other construction (engineering, building, regional planning and even a bribe or two). This is a very necessary reflection. For one thing, it works against the statement that what the Nazis did was unconceivable, unthinkable and unapproachable, as Badiou reminds us, this kind of statement turns a blind eye to a crucial point, that is, that they did think it and that they did approach it, and they did so in great detail and with great determination.[458] And for another, when the trials after the war take place nobody seems to feel responsible, none of the people that thought, designed and built the camps, and none of the people that contributed to their daily functioning express guilt.

It deals with a specific, traumatic, historical event, but it deals with it as a part of something larger (fascism, war, racism, industry), and of something that is not only in the past (it mentions the conflict in Algiers taking place at the time). We hear the warning words: "War nods to sleep but always keeps on eye open (…) As if we were cured once and for all of the scourge of the camps. We pretend it all happened only once, at a given time and place. We turn a blind eye to surround us". The landscape of Auschwitz is treacherously calm, its emptiness contrasts with what it once held. "We can only show you an empty shell." It is but a shell, but so are the archival images, they

[458] Badiou, *El siglo*, p. 15.

are but the carcass of something so unimaginable that it cannot be translated and must not be left unaddressed. "These are all we have left to imagine a night of piercing cries"

The archival images start with images of 1933, when "the machine starts" as the voiceover says, we see triumphant images of national socialism and we hear the narrator state "A nation must have no discord," it this very overbearing attitude of monolithic thinking and representing and making politics that the film addresses and that the essay eschews. The essay is the perfect form to fight against tyranny, in the sense that it not only accepts discord, contradiction, and dissent, but it is in fact built on it and it invites it furthermore.

The images don't illustrate the text, they are another level of communication. And the text does not explain the images. Images, text and music build the story; it is their combination, which is so much more than the sum of the parts, that produces the film. I have taken a small detour because this film is an astonishing example of the potentialities of an essay film made with recycled footage.[459]

Essay films in general, and Resnais' film in particular, make clear, among other things, that images, however shocking or terrible they might be, are not enough. Memory on its own might not be enough either. In *Night and Fog* it is through the combination of memory, images, music, poetry and reflection that we can begin to approach something so complex and truly terrifying. As we hear in Michel Bouquet's voice, "Mud and water fills the graves. Muddy water as murky as our memory". Images too can become murky no matter how pristine in appearance.

2.4.5. ESSAY FILMS AND APPROPRIATED FOOTAGE

There is a special relationship between essay films and appropriation films. That is not to say that all essay films appropriate footage, nor all filmic productions that recycle footage are essayistic. It is important to point out that my aim is not to simply and unproblematically term the films seen in the thesis "essay films," but to view them under the prism of what the essayistic has to offer when thinking of these films as texts to be read. There is an interesting overlapping between essay films and appropriation

[459] Since then, there have been several films that have addressed the issues of the camps and the Nazi undertakings during the III Reich, some with the use of previous footage, such as *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969, Marcel Ophüls), some without a single scene of archival material, such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoa* (1985).

films (in Baron's use of the term). To begin with, both have to do with the "tearing down of categories," they are hard to situate, they seem to inhabit an in-betweeness. Leyda when defining compilation stated that it offered the communication of more abstract concepts than habitual fiction films, more complex propaganda arguments that can be expected of radio or newspaper, and that it took artistic imagination and skill to turn images from actualities into something that will remain in the spectator's consciousness.[460]

Among other characteristics, both are of a fragmentary nature. For Baron, as has been said, metonymy is the key trend in contemporary documentary approach to history and the recycling of images offers a "transfer of presence," and "experience of history" instead of a stable narrative of the past. What the appropriation film can do, when the footage is interwoven as an essay, is offer a confrontation with the vast yet partial and discontinuous archive of materials that precede any construction of historical understanding. What we get are reflections on historical events and the images that come to represent them, there seems to be no event outside mediation, there can be no recourse to the past without a trace that hints to it. These films work on the traces to construct a text, instead of searching confirmation of a story through the images that have recorded it. The essay does not have to offer truths beyond a doubt, which leads us once again to another core quality of contemporary documentary in artistic contexts, according to Steyerl, uncertainty.

The essay, like the appropriated film, not only does not have to limit itself to what is novel, its great analytical force resides in the fact that there is a lapse of time. Study and manipulation is essential. Creating and walking a distance is essential. Images do not speak for themselves, however seductive, and this becomes easier to see when there is a distance. The contrasting times of an appropriation film sheds light on this, but it is the film essayist who can work on this to a fuller potential by speaking through the images, writing with the images.

One common feature among the directors of the films included in this thesis is that their process when working on these recorded images is intertwined with their thought process, the images quick-start their thinking, and their thoughts make them go over the images time and again. They are working out the images, working out their

[460] Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, p. 10.

thoughts, working themselves out, as it were. We could say that there is an essayistic approach and treatment of the images, in their interweaving into new films. To compile images, found images, does not automatically imply a questioning of representation, for a film with recycled footage to be critical there must be a concern for their historical specificity, there must be an interrogation, a search, an uncertainty to address. The directors' process of working on the images is intertwined with their unfolding on screen.

Before it has been said that a camera does not work like a pen, but working with images that have already been shot in a certain sense might be closer to the nature of essayistic writing. In the sense that essays are always motivated by something, they refer to something before, Lukács believed that "the title of every essay is preceded in invisible letters, by the words 'Thoughts occasioned by…'."[461] The films seen in this thesis work on specific visual memories. There is a meeting of personal memory and historical memory (official historical memory), there is a clash between them. In the essay film, as well as in the literary essay, social historical exploration and personal exploration come together.[462] And due to its "self-reflexive nature and metacritical attitude, the essayistic film is particularly inclined to explore the relationship between image and reality, between film and document, between audiovisual record and historical event. (…) Essay films pose searching questions about cinema as repository of memory, as museum and as archive". [463]

Because of all this, essay films offer a privileged position for thinking, for interrogating images on their own terms. Essay films have an important role to fill, in the sense that moving images are part of historical and social processes, they ask the questions what is being preserved? What is being passed down?[464] And acknowledge that those images are with what we have to deal with, the images themselves and the systems that produced them.

Essay films made of appropriated footage are not about commenting on images, or not only, but thinking through them, with them. They are prolonged acts of speech, unfinished because each image in itself is a ruin, remains of what it was when it was

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[461] Georg Lukács, "*op. cit.*, p. 15.
[462] Blumlinger, Christa. "Leer Entre Las Imagines." In *La Forma Que Piensa. Tentativas En Torno Al Cine-Ensayo*, edited by Antonio Weinrichter, 50-63. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2007, p. 55.
[463] Rascaroli, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
[464] Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

direct representation of reality; and because speech does not come to an end.[465] They offer a critical practice "which may be prompted by the difficulty of coming to terms with an increasingly complex nonfiction landscape, in which both documentary and fictional impulses come to merge in challenging ways."[466] For this reason the essay film could be seen as a territory that represents the "antithesis of the ruin", in the sense that there is a there is a shift from reality to filmic reality.[467] What appropriation films do is more than quoting images, some authors defend that they are *rewriting*,[468] but actually they could be considered as *writing*, writing essayistically with both images and words. Appropriation, in these cases, can be understood as a foundational gesture of essay film.

2.4.6. THE ESSAYIST AND THE DESTRUCTION OF EXPERIENCE

If what we are dealing with in essayistic films made with archival footage is the "transfer of presence," if what is crucial is experience, then it might be necessary to offer a definition of "experience". To define experience is no minor endeavour, it well merits a thesis of its own. For now I would like to recur to a definition that will help us shed some light on the issues at hand, it is a definition by Miriam Hansen: "Experience is that which mediates individual perception with social meaning, conscious with unconscious processes, loss of self with self-reflexivity; experience as the capacity to see connections and relations…; experience as the matrix of conflicting temporalities, of memory and hope, including the historical loss of those dimensions."[469]

If we can consider moving images as part of "public life," of "public space", which in Arendt's terms is defined as the world which, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.[470] The tripartite structure of the essay mentioned above: subjectivity, public experience and thinking, is what defines the dialogue of the essayist with him or her self, as well as the dialogue open to the spectator, who is met

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[465] Catalá, Josep Maria. "Las Cenizas De Pasolini Y El Archivo Que Piensa." In *La Forma Que Piensa. Tentativas En Torno Al Cine-Ensayo*, edited by Antonio Weinrichter, 92-108. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2007, p. 99.
[466] Rascaroli, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[467] Catalá, *op. cit*., p. 97.
[468] Miranda, Luis. "El Cine-Ensayo Como Historia Experimental De Las Imágenes." In *La Forma Que Piensa. Tentativas En Torno Al Cine-Ensayo*, edited by Antonio Weinrichter, 142-55. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2007, p. 154.
[469] Quoted in Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[470] *Ibid.*, p. 32

with a big demand. Essay films make malleable what seems monolithic, history as we come to know it through media. One of the ways it does so is by having the essayist recur to him or herself. He or she is a point of entry. All essays have in common "the inscription of a blatant, self-searching authorial presence," there is not a transparent "We".[471]

The essayist is "a public figure", different to more conventional public figures, such as the journalist or the politician, even to the storyteller as defined by Benjamin. The essayist is characterized by an attitude of interrogation, towards his or her subject matter and towards her authorship. The cinematic essayist dialogues, asks questions, he or she is inclined to explore the relationship between image and reality, record and historical event. This kind of interrogation of footage from the present is opposed to nostalgic uses of footage. This time lag is essential in the historical essay film. Tim Corrigan speaks of "editorial intervention" in the news, which turns events rapidly into past (where the viewer easily becomes a silent subject of a media history). To edit in his sense means to investigate or to open events with "an opinion" or an idea about history. In his words, "Thinking through current events becomes the demonstration of an agency or a place for agency as it arrests and reconfigures itself within that current of events, both archaeologically *down* through a past, and *across* a moving present."[472] This "editorial intervention" has the capacity to activate a thinking subject before the screen. The essay creates clashes and gaps that demand thought. It asks the viewers to experience the world, a world that is mediated through technology and through the ideas of the essayist who offers a subjective positioning in his or her intervention.

In the previous chapter, regarding appropriated footage, I have mentioned how some authors understand found footage filmmaking as an "aesthetics of ruins," that it creates a spectator position that is historical, and that recycled images invite self-reflection. However, this does not occur automatically, it does not come by the simple act of repurposing images, there are innumerable example of music videos and publicity advertisements that recur to archival images and they do not have this effect. In order to create a spectator position that is historical and to have these images invite self-reflection an essayistic element is necessary. It is this essayistic element that is crucial to the idea of "transfer of experience", without context, without thought, without an

[471] Arthur, "Essay Questions", p. 60.
[472] Corrigan, *op. cit*., p.171.

essayist weaving, writing with these images, how could they be any different to so many other chains of images that pass us by.

I have insisted on the centrality of "experience" in the chapters dedicated to documentary and appropriated film, and pointed out the paradox between this stress on experience and the idea of the destruction or expropriation of experience. I have recurred to Neville and Villeneuve, their idea that life is what remains, the traces amid the ruins of experience and that, according to them, this concept of remains provides a new paradigm for questioning culture today. I agree with the idea of the importance of traces and remains, but are those ruins really the ruins of experience? Perhaps they are the ruins of a certain kind of experience? There seems to be a significant shift in how we understand the world, current and past events, as well as the intertwining of temporalities. How do we experience the world around us, which includes not only what is happening but what has been passed on to us?

I would like to go over some of Agamben's arguments when he speaks of the destruction of experience and see what the essay film has to offer in regards to it. Agamben argues that experience is no longer accessible to us because events have become untranslatable into experience. However, the essay aims at, longs to, express that which is impossible, to translate that which is untranslatable, to make visible the invisible. In the essay we find an attitude of inquiry, of challenging, of trying, of *essaying*, of not letting the last word be pronounced and not pretending to have the last word. Agamben does not mean to say that there are no more experiences, but that they are enacted outside the individual, who can only observe. However, one thing that I have been insisting on in the thesis so far is how the spectator is not a mere bystander, or does not have to be. The spectator is not a passive figure; the spectator can be a critical, reflective receiver and creator of meaning. If experience is externalized, it does not mean that it cannot also be internalized, worked on, thought through, felt, *experienced*. Specifically with moving images, or still images, we receive so much information from them, but there is also much lacking and this becomes apparent when these images are appropriated, scrutinized and used as writing tools forming essays that make statements both on the events depicted and on the recording mechanisms that have depicted them.

Another central statement in Agamben's reasoning is that to experience something means divesting it of its novelty, and currently one key characteristic of the production of images is the obsession with the idea of novelty, their cutting-edgeness, their live

transmission. It is important to not loose sight of the fact that it takes time to think an image, much longer than to just see it. The essay film that uses appropriated images can play an essential role in thinking these images, which means thinking both the present and the past, thinking how we produce images and what images themselves produce, images which age at a striking pace that only seems to speed up. Speed and change could be seen as essential in the idea of loss of experience. For Benjamin this loss had to do with the outcome of the First World War, where what seemed an insurmountable gap between culture and experience was made evident. For Benjamin experience was a guarantee of continuity in a sense, it was the capacity to bring events in line with the past; it reduced the shock of the new by recurring to the authority of tradition. Now, a century after the Great War, what seems to have become a tradition is the incessant newness of everything, the mediated knowledge that we have of different events and the vertiginous pace at which they age and almost disappear from sight. For Benjamin the figure of the storyteller was essential because he had the capacity to accumulate experiences, to make them his own and pass them on creating experience. Benjamin saw little room for such a figure in his time, however, he himself became an excellent example of a figure that now has become, or so I believe, crucial: the essayist. Nowadays the accumulation of experiences is externalized, and one of the ways it is externalized is via recording devices such as those that produce moving images. The essayist always refers to something previous, to something within that unbridgeable accumulated experience and makes it his or her own by asking questions, reflecting, making it more than a cultural reference, letting it change him or her in his or her process of thinking it. Benjamin essayed brilliantly on some of the effects the mechanical reproduction of images was to have and on a new conception of historian that would brush history against the grain. One thing he did not come to see was how these mechanical reproductions would enable us to literally appropriate images, to pass them on and to brush history against the grain by recurring to images that were either discarded or used to such an extent that they needed to be seen anew. It is tempting to think that if Benjamin were here today, his insight and his ability to share his thoughts and his experience of the everyday might have taken the shape of essay films.

PART II

Chapter 3

RADICAL SCAVENGING FOR *THE ATOMIC CAFÉ*

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The Atomic Café (1982) was the result of a collaborative effort between Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty and Pierce Rafferty, who created "The Archives Project Inc." with the purpose of producing and distributing the film. It was released in the spring of 1982, during Reagan's first administration and its forced civil defence revival.[473] "Five years of painstaking research and brilliant reconstruction have resulted in an incisive, hilarious and shattering look at the attitudes that Civil Defense, military and political authorities would have the populace hold toward atomic warfare."[474]

It all started when Pierce Rafferty found thousands of films made by the US government.[475] More specifically, he stumbled upon the catalogue "3433 US government films" in a San Francisco bookstore in 1976 and he came up with the idea of making a movie with these films.[476] His brother, Kevin Rafferty, and Jayne Loader, who embarked on the project in 1977, edited the material.[477] Initially the filmmakers planned to make a movie about propaganda, but they narrowed their focus to concentrate on films about the birth of the atomic age.[478] It was only during the process that they decided to focus their attention on that specific period, and within that age they made the conscious decision of limiting it to the "Golden Age of Cold War paranoia".[479] The Rafferty brothers had inherited money, which they used to fund their project. They had a budget of $ 300.000.[480]

Pierce and Kevin Rafferty came from a rather influential New York family.[481] Pierce was born in 1952 and starting his filmmaking career as a consultant and archival

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[473] www.conelrad.com

[474] Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader and Pierce Rafferty, *THE ATOMIC CAFE: The Book of the Film*, New York: Peacock Press/Bantam Book, 1982. (NO PAGE NUMBER, first page of the book, before paging starts).

[475] "The Atomic Cafe Review." *TV Guide*. http://movies.tvguide.com/the-atomic-cafe/review/132678 (Last accessed September 2 2013).

[476] Olubunmi, Oloruntoba John. "The Atomic Cafe." *Senses of Cinema*, no. 31 (April 2004). http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/cteq/atomic_cafe/ (Last accessed September 2 2013).

[477] Canby, Vincent. 1982. "Documentary on Views about Atomic Bomb." *The New York Times*, March 17 1982. http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E06E3D71038F934A25750C0A964948260 (Last accessed November 24 2014).

[478] "The Atomic Cafe Review." *TV Guide*.

[479] www.conelrad.com

[480] *ibid*

[481] Their maternal grandfather, Marvin Pierce, was president and later chairman of an important publisher (The McCall Corporation), their mother was Barbara Bush's older sister, and their ancestry goes back to early New England colonists, with whom their share a common ancestor, Franklin Pierce, the 14th president of the United States. Faverman, Mark. "Kevin Rafferty's Harvard Beats Yale 29-29. A Documentary About the '68 Game for the Ages." *Berkshire Fine Arts* (2008). Published electronically

researcher for the documentaries *With Babies and Banners* (1976, Lorraine Gray), *The War at Home* (1979, Stewart Silber and Barry Alexander Brown), *The Wobblies* (1979, Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer), *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980, Connie Field), and *Target…Earth* (1980, Joost Van Rees).[482] After *The Atomic Cafe* he continued to work as an archival researcher and archival footage supplier, having funded Petrified Inc. in 1985, together with his former spouse, Margaret Crimmins.[483] He is currently the director of the Henry L.Ferguson Museum in Fishers Island, New York.[484]

Kevin Rafferty, born in 1948, is a cinematographer, documentary film director and producer. He studied at Harvard, where he entered in contact with the documentary filmmaker Bob Gardner and Don Levy. When the latter was hired to teach at a film school in California, Kevin went with him as his assistant. It was not long before he returned East and the New Hampshire Public Television commissioned him to make a doc about a collective farm run by a Maoist commune.[485] He directed *Two Days in a Halfway House for the Emotionally Disturbed* (1973) together with Richard Cohen and *Hurry Tomorrow* (1975) together with Richard Cohen and Richard Chen, before embarking on *The Atomic Cafe*. He has continued his work as a cinematographer and producer, not just on his own projects, but also supporting younger documentarians such as Robert Stone, in the role of associate producer in his Oscar nominated documentary *Radio Bikini* (1982), and Michael Moore, as cinematographer in is breakthrough documentary *Roger & Me* (1989). He continues to direct acclaimed documentaries such as *Blood in the Face* (1991), *Feed* (1992), *The Last Cigarette* (1999), *Who Wants to Be President?* (2000), and *Harvard Beats Yale 29-29* (2008).[486]

Jayne Loader, born in 1951, is a writer and multimedia artist. She worked as a freelance journalist, critic, ghost-writer, and film professor before joining the Rafferty

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November 19 2008. http://www.berkshirefinearts.com/11-19-2008_kevin-rafferty-s-harvard-beats-yale-29-29.htm (Last accessed September 12 2015).

[482] www.imdb.com; http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2ba0c56a46.

[483] "Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, & Pierce Rafferty Biography." *CINEDIGM ENTERTAINMENT*. http://www.newvideo.com/filmmakers/jayne-loader-kevin-rafferty-pierce-rafferty-biography/ (Last accessed September 2 2013)

[484] fergusonmuseum.org.

[485] O'Rourke, Sean. "July 2009 Kevin Rafferty." *Harvardwood* (July 2009). http://www.harvardwood.org/blogpost/1130950/184474/July-2009--Kevin-Rafferty-70 (Last accessed September 2 2013).

[486] www.imdb.com; http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2ba0c56458.

brothers on *The Atomic Café*.[487] She started her career in film as a consultant for *With Babies and Banners* (1976, Lorraine Gray), where she coincided with Pierce Rafferty, and as an archive researcher for *Song of the Canary* (1978, Josh Hanig and David Davis).[488] After *The Atomic Cafe*, she worked on a film concerning animal rights that fell through after much hard work.[489] She also worked on a documentary for the Disney Channel about outlandish American fads, which never saw the light since Disney found it "too political."[490] In 1994, together with her husband Eric Schwaab, she started working for a book and CD-ROM about women aviators; however, when the French resumed nuclear testing in the Pacific, she was prompted to return to the themes of *The Atomic Cafe* and created the interactive CD-ROM *Public Shelter*. During the late 1990s she travelled the world to speak about nuclear issues and curated media workshops.[491]

3.2. THE FILM

3.2.1. SYNOPSIS

The film starts by giving us a particular context and date: World War II, July 1945. It mentions how the war had ended in Europe and how it was still being fought in the Pacific. The first thing we are shown are images of Alamogordo, the site of the Trinity Test, the music we hear is dramatic, reminiscent of film noir of the 1940s. The sequence of the Trinity Test is followed by images of Paul Tibbets, the pilot who released the bomb over Hiroshima, and his plane the Enola Gay. While Tibbets talks we see images of the plane flying over Japan and images from the ground, the latter supposedly from Hiroshima, but in all likelihood taken from fiction films. Within these images we find the image of a Japanese man smartly dressed that looks up (I will go

[487] "Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, & Pierce Rafferty Biography." *CINEDIGM ENTERTAINMENT*. http://www.newvideo.com/filmmakers/jayne-loader-kevin-rafferty-pierce-rafferty-biography/ (Last accessed September 2 2013); "Jayne Loader", *INDIEPIX*. http://www.indiepixfilms.com/search-results?type=all&submit.x=-900&submit.y=0&id=jayne+loader (Last accessed September 2 2013).
[488] "Jayne Loader" *BFI*, (http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2ba0c56750)
[489] Young, Carey. "Interview Jayne Loader." *Mute* 1, no. 7 (January 10th 1997). http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/interview-jayne-loader (Last accessed September 10 2015).
[490] Wen, Howard. "Ground Zero." *The Dallas Observer*, June 27th 1996. http://www.dallasobserver.com/news/ground-zero-6403641 (Last accessed September 10 2015).
[491] Wen, *op.cit.*

back to this image further in the text, since it has been the source of certain controversy). Tibbets explains how what started almost as a routine opperation ended up impressing the crew, once they saw the damage done to Hiroshima, a damage which he terms "inconceivable." Afterwards we hear how the news is announced on the radio and then we see Truman, first smiling, unable to hide his satisfaction – an image rarely seen – and then announcing with grave rectus the news of Hiroshima's bombing - an image that is more familiar. These announcements are followed by the images of headlines. We also see the bombing of Nagasaki and hear the simpler, and more concise, words of Captain Kermit K. Beahan, who made the run over Nagasaki. Afterwards we see images of celebration and headlines referring to Japan's surrender. We hear two radio commentators joking frivolously about Hiroshima as the images go from the festivities of V-day in the US to the debris and corpses of the bombings. Again we hear Tibbets, who speaks of Hiroshima as a "virgin target" and of how the government conducted a "classroom experiment – as far as being able to determine later the bomb damage." The images we see are those of army personnel taking notes and measuring different effects. Tibbets also speaks of a "guilt complex and the feeling *could* be that the less said about it by the United States government, the better." These sombre declarations are followed by upbeat music and the text "PEACE. It's Wonderful" and images of marching bands and parades.

It is now 1946 and we see people enjoying themselves on roller coasters, dancing and at the beach; and we see heterosexual couples kissing and marrying, and families sitting down to their dinners. We are interrupted by a radio broadcast that tells us it is June 30th 1946 and "almost time," we see people listening to their radios with great expectation as the Bikini Atoll Test is about to take place. We see Vice Admiral W.H.P. Blandy reassuring the public, we see a map of the Marshall Islands and the indigenous population being mislead while they are described in a most condescending way. At one precise moment we see how the evacuation of the islanders is staged: we see and hear a clapperboard while someone announces "scene twenty-six, take two. Alright Commodore" before an army official speaks to a group of islanders and King Judah, both the army official and King Judah concur that things are now in "God's hands." It is not until we are 15 minutes into the film that we find any mention of radiation. The detonation takes place and we see many men watching and then covering their eyes, we hear there are "4200 men watching", and we see the explosion from three different angles.

Afterwards we read “Paramount Pictures Presents 1947 Year of Division. Narrated by George Putnam and Maurice Joyce,” the message that follows is a warning against Russia’s “ruthless expansion of the Total State,” illustrated with maps, the image of Stalin and army marches; images that are reminiscent both of World War II, of how Nazi Germany was represented in newsreels, and of how Hollywood represented the conflict in fiction films such as *Casablanca* (1942). We see an animated film that brings to life the threats that the voice-over announces, these images are followed by a presenter that informs us that what we are seeing is a film by the American Legion Post 279 and thanks the sponsors, two shopping centres in California that he describes as “concrete expressions of the practical idealism that built America” and later comments “who can help but contrast the beautiful, the practical things” of the shopping centres “with what you’d find under communism.” All this is followed by a newsreel announcer who warns us against “our enemy” and states the necessity of supporting the military, while we see men and women representing every militaristic institution marching in the shape of an arrowhead with the map of the US as a backdrop.

Once again the public is alarmed with threatening headlines such as “RUSS HAVE A-BOMB SECRETS,” followed by a string of simulations in classrooms while we hear a cheerful country tune. Next we are confronted with images of Korea, the use of an atomic bomb is under consideration, we see an images of president Truman, and families tuning in with their TV sets to see the president, we see images that were broadcasted, such as Congressman Van Zandt stating “we could destroy them and contaminate them”. Once again we see a map and the only text within that map is the word “ENEMY,” we hear different government representatives as well as civilians being interviewed, in the simplest of terms. This is followed by excerpts from an army training film in which a soldier reads a letter from home that warns him of what is happening, which makes his superior recall what happened during his last visit back home. This is followed by a flashback of this officer, together with another soldier and a sailor, listening to a woman on a soapbox that is giving an anti-war speech and defending communism, she is quickly silenced by the three men. This simulated scene is followed by images of the House of Un-American Activities Committee, where we see another person being shamefully silenced; in this case it is John Howard Lawson, who desperately tries to go beyond yes or no, with us or against us arguments, and manifests his concern for the Bill of Rights, which he sees being destroyed by the process.

The hearing is followed by an image of Richard Nixon showing a piece of microfilm that has been filtered to the enemy; this serves as introduction to the Rosenbergs. We first see them without any narration; they seem so ordinary, so non-threatening, no different to the other parents shown in the film, just infinitely sad. If we did not know who they were, nothing would incline us to believe that they are anything other than quiet, composed individuals and a loving couple. We see people parading banners; some are enthusiastic about the Rosenbergs' impending execution and others merciful. Those who show more compassion do so in name of the children, one of their arguments of defence was that their children should not be orphaned. We do not hear any reports until they are dead, when the news declares them vile traitors and monsters. A newsreel correspondent, Bob Considine, who without necessarily doubting the sentence Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were put to, nonetheless, seems deeply impressed by the execution when he announces their death. And almost immediately we are slapped with a contrasting announcement "Now 'The Great Day Show'!," and the soundtrack of the film is filled with cheerful sounds.

The next sequence is that of a calendar that starts in 1953 and goes back to 1950, followed by different citizens (two priests, two women and a man) expressing their support of the hydrogen bomb. Again we see an animation, reminiscent of World War II newsreels, where the threat of communism is highlighted, and an animation of a man being boxed within two large hands, during which we hear "In times of social crisis and tension, in times when… the individual… knows that something is wrong but doesn't know what, when he feels himself a pawn… he listens to an authoritarian voice". We hear a song that praises Eisenhower and the speech in which he praises America's strength and its role as a world leader as well as his appeal to God. While we hear his words, we see images of cars, people eating hamburgers, shopping in large supermarkets overflowing with a wide variety of products, and then we see the products: TV dinners, whipped cream, toothpaste, and, finally, families gathering in front of their televisions. These domestic scenes of bliss reveal not only how people were getting their information (namely television and radio), but also the hierarchical structure of many homes, the mother is almost a servant, the kids are obedient, and the father figure is clearly the one in charge, not only of what the family is to do, but of what the family is to view and to listen.

Senator Lyndon Johnson states that both the US and its enemy have the bomb. Now we see more tests and, for the first time in the film, radiation seems to be a

concern. We hear admiral Lewis Strauss assure the public that radiation is not an issue, while we see images of victims suffering from the effects of radiation. These chilling sequences are followed by images that hint towards an "Atomic fashion", which included "atomic cocktails." The directors follow this brief hint with the image of a book on bio-medical effects, and afterwards with images of tests involving pigs. Fifty minutes in the film we are introduced to a base where we see placards that read "IF YOU WOULDN'T TELL STALIN DON'T TELL ANYONE" or "TALK MEANS TROUBLE. DON'T TALK". These images seem to correspond with Troop Test Smoky, and we see how the soldiers are being briefed, they are told the explosion is a beautiful sight and that there are three dangers: the blast, the heat and radiation, which is "the least important" of the three. There is a very interesting sequence during this briefing session where, to reassure the soldiers of how unimportant the threat of radiation is, the Briefing Officer says "if you receive enough gamma radiation to cause sterility or severe sickness, you'll be killed by blast, flying debris or heat *anyway*" and as we are hearing this statement we see two soldiers looking at each other with what seems as a startled gesture. Next is a scene from an army film in which a chaplain explains the experience of witnessing an atomic bomb with the intention of reassuring the soldiers. We see an instructional film that explains that the substances (dust and debris) are only hazardous if introduced to the body via mouth or ruptures in the skin, afterwards we see soldiers being interviewed, telling the camera how they got a "mouthful" of dust, followed by soldiers marching into zero ground, this succession of images creates a great tension.

Next we are presented with the town of Saint George in Utah, where the radio announces that due to the wind there might be a mild danger of radiation, people are recommended to stay inside for an hour, but to not be alarmed since there is no real peril. This is followed by the voice of an army film narrator explaining how "never before have so many known so little about a subject so big and so important." To get acquainted he opens a book on Test Abe, that is supposed to instruct the audience. It is clearly stated that atomic bombs do not have the monopoly of risk. The following images show how risks are common when working as a fireman, cooking when you are homemaker and even in the shower. The narrator insists on the falsity of the effects that some proclaim, and on how even the most trivial ones, such as hair loss, are harmful. We see a simple graphic that compares how much worry the bomb creates, 80%, and how many deaths it produces, 15%.

Next, we see how schoolchildren are being informed and educated regarding nuclear weapons. We see scenes from a kids' television show, where they speak of nuclear energy and state the need to better understand the atomic bomb. The host shows a short film, the animation that follows is *Duck and Cover*, one of the most famous sequences of *The Atomic Cafe*. This film was screened in schools across the country to teach children how to proceed in case of a nuclear attack, they were told to "duck and cover" and to "be ready all the time." It has a catchy jingle to better memorize the instructions; at one point the lyrics start saying "you and you and you and you…" the images go from classrooms and children to images of Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan and Einstein. This sequence is followed by a clapping auditorium, which seems to highlight the fictional character of these instructions, how in fact these measures would not serve as protection in any account. Afterwards, we see somebody from the audience asking how far one should be from the blast to avoid harm, the person on the stage answers 12 miles. Immediately after we see Seymour Melman stating a very different figure, he speaks of a 2000 square mile radius, and alerts that shelters are not a solution for survival, basing that statement on what was learned in the Second World War.

Once again the directors go from scientific facts to civil defence cartoons that speak of a new illness: "nuclearosis". We see an add for houses built with shelters and hear professor Mario Salvadori of Columbia University stating how these shelters "psychologically, they will *push* both us and the Russians into thinking more of having a war." These words are followed by a comical music (similar to that which now accompanies old slapstick films) on top of images that show the profusion of bomb shelters. Mixed with the images of bomb shelters we see a television appearance by Nixon and Khrushchev, who are engaged in boastful dialogue, which is as comical as it is chilling. We see a family going into their shelter and we hear, and at times see, a priest explaining his views on shelter protocols. Among his arguments he defends that one should not have to admit the needy stranger into his shelter, and that this decision falls upon the father, who is also legitimately entitled to keep weapons in the shelter to defend his family.

These serious and threatening ideas are juxtaposed with some of the most frivolous atomic imagery, such as a fashion model posing with a backdrop of a rocket, dancing scenes while we hear the lyrics to a bomb song sung by a man who boasts about being the only man among 13 women. We see Nixon in a newsreel during "Mental Health Week," which is followed by the recommendation to supply the shelters

with tranquilizers, which according to the narrator are not narcotic nor habit forming, and estimating that 100 pills will suffice for a family of four. Again we see radios and people listening to them, later we see how the broadcast is produced in the radio station, where all of a sudden a call is received and the broadcast must be interrupted to make a serious announcement: we are under nuclear attack. We see the firing of missiles and how people run to shelters, or duck and cover (even if it is under their coat). We hear classical music, the pop and country tunes are substituted by music that inspires awe. Again we see the image of the Japanese man that was shown at the very beginning of the film, adding a sort of cyclical feeling to the film. We see the detonation of a series of bombs and the debris left behind. When it seems like it is over we see a father ask his children to pick up the glass and debris and with ease says that there is nothing left to do except "wait for orders from the authorities and relax."

As the credits role by we see images of scientists measuring, animations depicting futuristic scenarios, with underground bases, rockets flying into the sky and detonations all over the globe. Afterwards we see the detonations of bombs and mushroom clouds that have already been featured in the film at different moments all edited together in a chain. One possible reading is how these "scientific experiments" might lead to total annihilation.

3.2.2. THE FILM'S SOURCES

The sources for the materials used are multiple. Among the original material we find military training and debriefing films (most of the declassified material responds to this type of films), and among them there are several "nuclear test documentaries." We also find newsreels from the 1940s and 1950s, where we can see "loaded headlines that presume the unimpeachable rightness of our [American] side, and the abject Evil of our [Communist] enemies."[492] Educational and Public Service Informational Films are another important source, a large part of which (if not all) were funded by unaccredited governmental dependencies; they represent what Erickson calls the "real Big Lie films, that audiences believed because they wanted to believe, or because they had no other

[492] Erickson, Glenn. "The Atomic Cafe." *DVD Savant* (2002). Published electronically March 18th 2002 http://www.dvdtalk.com/dvdsavant/s442cafe.html (Last accessed June 6 2014).

sources of information."[493] And last, but not least important, we find sounds and images coming from entertainment and publicity sources, such as television and radio broadcasts.[494]

3.2.2.1. Films Produced by Governmental Agencies

The main producers of the military and debriefing films, as well as the educational films, were US agencies such as the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) and the US Armed Forces. We can trace the origin of films such as *The Magic of the Atom* (1954) and *Duck and Cover* (1951) back to these agencies.[495]

Within the military films one specific kind of film seems to stand out, a subgenre of documentary that Mielke has termed "nuclear test documentary."[496] These films imply the argument that "conducting and observing nuclear explosions is really a scientific endeavor, not geopolitical saber-rattling," and what we get is "an uncanny world, although it is still our world."[497] Within the tests featured we find the Trinity Test, which took place in New México in July of 1945,[498] as well as the tests done in the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands, which at the time had been covered with more than half million feet of film. In 1946 the tests Abe and Baker were shot from every conceivable angle.[499] However, it was not until 1947 that this subgenre gained momentum. During that year a special film studio was created by the Air Force at Laurel Canyon in the Hollywood hills in anticipation of the need to document nuclear testing. It was a self-contained studio that produced, directed, and edited 6,500 documentary films between 1947 and 1969.[500] Before its creation, the US Army Signal Corps cameramen handled the first photographic records. Also in 1947 the 1352nd

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[493] *Ibid.*
[494] *Ibid.*
[495] Olobunmi, *op. cit.*
[496] Mielke, Bob. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Nuclear Test Documentary." *Film Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 28-37.
[497] *Ibid.*, p. 29
[498] Boyle, Deirdre. "The Atomic Cafe." *Cineaste* 12, no. 2 (1982): 39-41, p. 39.
[499] Mielke, *op. cit.*, p. 29. In the film, these images are complemented with newsreel footage of the evacuation, where we see King Judah and his people being mislead to persuade them to move.
[500] Many of these films remained classified in 2005, according to Mielke. Mielke, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Photographic Group at the Lookout Mountain Air Force Station studio in California developed high-speed cameras.[501]

Since these films are one of the most important sources of *The Atomic Cafe* it might be useful to mention their common characteristics as established by Mielke.[502] First, their style is simple and functional. The camerawork is simple, as is common in "ephemeral" films such as instructional films or industrial documentaries, to which they hold more similarities than to documentaries in the "great documentary tradition." The storytelling is straightforward, linearly progressive, except for the occasional use of flashbacks. Many are shaped as a "filmic book," starting with a military official pulling a book off a shelf with the test series as the title and ending with the closing of the book and sometimes putting it back on the shelf. Something that can be seen as a condescending gesture that signals to the infantilization of the public by these government agencies. A central element is the use of voice-over narration, which is relentlessly cheery in its use of similes and metaphors to naturalize the uncanniness of these weapons and their testing, and the narration is "breezy" and "weirdly reminiscent of pulp detective fiction and film noir voiceover, (it) reassures the viewer that we are not in a completely new and incomprehensible situation here."[503] They include music by Air Force bands and the like, playing knockoffs of 19th century romanticism, which aim to produce awe and wonder.

Second, testing is "a date with destiny," the workings of fate, not human agency; which seems to contradict another of their common characteristics: the emphasis placed on the opperations' status as scientific experiments (rather than as weapons) and the importance placed on what Wiener called "American know-how."[504] This contradiction is quite remarkable, testing is said to be done in interest of science, and yet it is not a product of human agency, but the workings of fate. On the other hand, when the enemy achieves the same knowledge, there is a strong emphasis on espionage and deceit; they are shown as meritless and evil usurpers, which are clearly personified by Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in the media. Even when documenting the blast damage in Hiroshima and Nagasaki the emphasis lies on the technical knowledge gleaned about building

[501] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[502] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-34.
[503] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[504] "There is at present a touching belief in this country [the United States] that we are the sole possessors of a certain technique called "know-how," which secures for us not only priority on all engineering and scientific developments and all major inventions, but (…) the moral right to that priority." Wiener, Norbert. *The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society*. London: Free Association Books, 1989, p. 125.

structures and blasts, completely omitting other (emotional and ethical) responses. Because of this scientific value imputed to the tests in these films, the need could be posited for endless continuation of testing. In Norbert Weiner's words, "The hurrying up of the pace of science, owing to our active simultaneous search for all means of attacking our enemies and of protecting ourselves, leads to ever-increasing demands for new research."[505]

Third, what Mielke terms the "Janus-faced aspect" of the bomb, that is, a weapon of death that might end war. However, there is a tension between the proclaimed "safety of bomb testing" and its unpredictable effects. These films rarely acknowledge radiological dangers in the voiceover.[506] This should come as no surprise, since the US government was adamant on keeping the effects of radiation, if not secret, to a minimum, even though the perils of radiation were nothing new (precautions had been taken for years when administering X rays). In this sense the government was purposefully misleading. A clear example of this can be found in Lifton and Mitchell's account of the preparations for the Trinity Test, they write: "Before the Trinity test, calculations suggested that fallout posed a threat to those living downwind from the site (…) General Groves rejected a proposal to evacuate or alert nearby residents in advance, there by establishing a precedent for secrecy overriding safety that would survive long after the end of the war."[507] The topic of fallout remained absent during decades in every account of the aftermath of the Hiroshima bomb.

The idea of the weapon that might end war is linked to another characteristic given by Mielke, he compares these films to the "John Wayne Western," where "we know the good guys are going to win."[508] The construction of "the good guys" is also representative to the films' ideological slant with regard to race (demonstrated in the scenes concerning evacuation of King Judah and his people, as well as the lack of regard for civil Japanese victims) and gender (the nuclear testing world is portrayed as a boys club). In these films there is also a clear link between the bomb and the values of church and state. However, reality was more complex, since many Church representatives did voice their concerns regarding the bomb. In any case, in these films

[505] *Ibid.*, p. 128.
[506] Mielke, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
[507] Lifton, Robert J. and Mitchell, Greg, . *Hiroshima in America*. New York: Avon Books, 1996, p. 43.
[508] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

the tests are represented as "the democratic will of people" and not as "sinister machinations of a national security state."[509]

Other films that were produced by government agency, with a very different public in mind, were educational films. However, both military films and educational films target a captive audience. The hysteria, after the Soviet Union's acquisition of nuclear weapons, as evidenced by the governments mass distribution of civil defence pamphlets in the 1950s, served to justify the increased stockpiling of nuclear weapons and to expand the series of weapon tests in Nevada and the Pacific.[510] Among these educational films we find the short subject civil defence film *Duck and Cover* (1951), which holds a special place due to the controversy it created in the early eighties, when it was reintroduced to the world. The directors found the film in the Factual Film Archive and they got a copy in 1978 or 1979.[511] It had been produced on behalf of the United States federal government and distributed by the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA). This short film, directed by Anthony Rizzo and produced by Leo M. Langlois for Archer Films, was meant to teach children how to survive a nuclear attack by themselves without adult assistance. The most recognizable and, for some, the most unsettling scenes were those of an animated turtle, Burt, who was shown together with a catchy tune.[512] The directors of *The Atomic Cafe* thought it was funny and that they could make it even funnier by editing. In Loaders own words: "It was so incredibly absurd. But it had that wonderful jingle. And the animated turtle. And that narrator. It was perfect in every way". [513]

3.2.2.2. Documents and Images of the Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

The portrayal of the bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is constructed with both non-fiction and fiction imagery. The factual images are varied,

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[509] Mielke, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
[510] Jacobs, Bo. "Atomic Kids: Duck and Cover and Atomic Alert Teach American Children How to Survive Atomic Attack." *Film & History* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 25-44, pp. 27-28.
[511] www.conelrad.com. Coincidently Lance Bird and Tom Johnson had also discovered the film while making "No Place to Hide" (1982), short that was part of PBS's series *Matters of Life and Death*. (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0262652/)
[512] Jacobs, Bo, *op. cit.* p. 28. Burt's tune, not coincidentally, was written by the same team that wrote the jingle "See the USA in a Chevrolet."
[513] www.conelrad.com

we find interviews with the pilots of the planes that carried the atomic bombs and images shot from other planes in the moment of detonation; as well as images of the burnt landscape and buildings in ruin and, significantly, some images that were not made public at the time of victims, both dead and injured.

The images of the attack on Hiroshima, of the bomber in flight and the blast, are revealing in the sense that they testify the experimental nature of the attack. No one was quite sure of the final effect it was to have. This is further stressed by the audio of the film, when we hear pilot Paul Tibbets explain his mission. The directors of *The Atomic Cafe* show his interview at length, and Tibbets offers one of the better-articulated and more complex meditations within the film. His mention of Hiroshima as a "virgin target," as well as a military one, and his putting forward the notion of the attack as almost a "classroom experiment," seems extremely candid when compared to the overbearing triumphalistic tone of the official discourse, as exemplified by newspaper headlines and the president's address. Truman, in his public address, warns against "the awful responsibility which has come to us (Americans)" that the bomb entails, but from his words we also hear that all has happened following God's will, more precisely he says "We must thank God that it *has* come to *us* instead of to our enemies, and we pray that He may guide us to *use* it in *His* ways and for His purposes."[514] This association of God's will and the creation, development and use of the bomb will be a constant element in the public image of the atomic bomb. Truman's tone is serious and grave, however, the directors of *The Atomic Cafe* include footage that was shot a few seconds prior to Truman's speech, which allows us to witness Truman's smile right before he slips into his "adequately" poised attitude for the address to the nation. This unstaged moment offers us unhindered access to Truman's satisfaction, which shines through before the signal to commence his speech. The inclusion of this sequence offers a new perspective. It is unacceptable as part of the official announcement, hence, it is deemed "news waste" and that is part of what makes it so important within the frame of *The Atomic Cafe*. It speaks volumes about how the official position regarding the bomb was construed, as well as how it distanced from the real self-satisfied feelings of some of the governmental sectors. What is waste for the media of the time is pure gold for this film, it changes the picture for us, it bursts the bubble of the seriousness and graveness of the image that was being distributed to the American public of the time.

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[514] Quoted as written in Rafferty, Kevin, Loader, Jayne and Rafferty, Pierce. *The Atomic Cafe: The Book of the Film*. New York: Peacock Press/Bantam Book, 1982, p. 12.

Probably the most striking images regarding Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the images of destruction. At the time, images of the barren landscape and the debris were shown, showcasing the structural damage to the city, but vacating it of any human elements in order to not jeopardize the image of victory and supremacy with elements that might appeal to the public's emotions. However, images of the human damage, of corpses lined up and wounded victims in what was left of the devastated hospitals did exist. A Japanese crew under the direction of Akira Iwasaki filmed the effects of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki shortly after the Occupation began. On October 17th 1945, one of the cameramen was arrested by the American military police in Nagasaki, and Iwasaki was instructed to stop all shooting and his footage was seized. Two days later, all filming in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was banned by Occupation officials. There was one exception to this order, an American film project under the direction of Lieutenant Daniel McGovern of the US Strategic Bombing Survey, who in turn hired Iwasaki and his crew to shoot thousands of additional footage. The material was edited into a documentary entitled *The Effects of the Atomic Bombs Against Hiroshima and Nagasaki*. The film was shipped to the US in May of 1946 and "disappeared", it was declared Top Secret and was not returned to the Japanese until 1968. The film would not be seen by almost anyone, certainly not anyone outside the military, for more than twenty years.[515] When the film, television and radio historian and producer Erik Barnouw heard of the film, he asked the Pentagon if he could watch the footage, he would later produce a short film with the original material entitled *Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945*, after a year of editing.[516] However, these images never came close to wide audience, and they certainly were not a part of the imagery that was associated with the atomic bomb in the 1940s and 1950s.

The directors of *The Atomic Cafe* did make an effort to approach, at least in part, what had happened in Japan from a perspective that was not imbued with the triumphalist tone of the victors. What was accessible to them were the films produced by Japan's film industry in the 1950s, so they recurred to sequences from a fiction film to give a view of Japan from the ground during the attack. The images of this fiction film are edited together with Paul Tibbets' account of the bombing of Hiroshima, and the images of his plane in flight, the *Enola Gay*, are juxtaposed to images of Japanese citizens walking along the streets. Among them there are several medium shots of a

[515] Lifton and Mitchell, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.
[516] Bob Mielke, *op. cit.*, p. 36 note 10; and Lifton and Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

well-dressed man standing against the sky, which I shall discuss at some length later in the chapter.

3.2.2.3. Radio and Television Broadcasts

Not surprisingly radio and television broadcasts are another important source for *The Atomic Cafe*. In the 1940s radio was the principle source for news and entertainment of many Americans. In just a decade television would replace these functions, but radio would still play an essential role in the structuring of daily life of many Americans that would listen to it in the morning, in their cars, and as part of their evening entertainment.

One of the interesting features of television's "coming of age" is that its chronology coincides, to a certain extent, with the development of the imagery of the atomic age and the visualization of the cold war as issued by the United States government's official pronouncements. Television was invented in the 1920s, but it did not exist for any practical purposes until after World War II. According to Jerry Mander, what would finally kick-start the spread of television sets was the need to find a vehicle for the advertisement of new commodities, which would be essential in the transition from a war economy to an economy of peace. Advertising, at least on the scale it would be developed from the 1950s onwards, barely existed before then either. A symbiotic relationship developed, by which advertising financed television's growth and television served as the upmost delivering system for advertising.[517] In Mander's words, "Everyone with a message to deliver – government, corporations, the military, community groups, gurus, teachers and psychologists – began drooling at the possibility of gaining access to this incredible machine that could put pictures into millions of people's heads at once."[518] Advertising was essential to the economic and political panorama of the years following the war. On the one hand, it was the perfect medium for the publicity of the new consumer products, which was essential to the economic growth once the war was over and, on the other, the government's new public policies had to be disseminated in the most effective ways. Among these new policies were two crucial issues, the creation of a new identity of the United States as a world power

[517] Mander, Jerry. *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*. New York: Quill, 1978, p. 134.
[518] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

confronted to its former ally, the Soviet Union, and the investigation and further development of nuclear weapons, which was confronted as a public relations issue.

The increasingly extensive production of television programs makes it a rich source to recur to for the directors of *The Atomic Cafe*, however, one must also take into account its fragility. Television was not only a new medium, and its formats and formulas were still being decided on, it was also a costly one. Many of the initial formats for its recordings, such as two-inch videotapes, were regularly reused to save money, erasing many programs.[519]

The Atomic Cafe covers the atomic propaganda from 1945 to 1960 approximately, coming short of what is commonly stated as television's "coming of age" in the United States, which corresponds with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and the around-the clock television reporting it inspired.[520] So what we are faced with in the images of *The Atomic Cafe* are the first images of the atomic age as well as the first images of the medium that from there on was to shape, and distribute, historical events as experience in day-to-day life. It is already clear during these years that television is a powerful source in the sense that it speaks not only of the propaganda of the era, but of a shift in the ordering of life, of which it is not only a representation but one of the "ordering" systems, together with freeways and shopping malls, which came to allow "the exchange of values between different ontological levels and otherwise incommensurable facets of life," such as the economic, societal, and symbolic realms of American culture.[521] According to LaFollete "The technological fruits of scientific understanding – automobiles, motion pictures, even radio itself – became essential and commonplace. Yet, at the same time, the way in which most people learned about science outside schoolrooms and textbooks – that is, through mass communications media – became increasingly shaped by entertainment values."[522]

Reportedly, in 1947, Americans regarded radio as "their most trustworthy source of information about the bomb" and during the five years following the war, hundreds of radio documentaries about atomic energy were broadcast in the United States.[523] But

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[519] Morse, Margaret. "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction. The Freeway, the Mall, and Television." In *Logics of Television. Essays in Cultural Criticism*, edited by Patricia Mellencamp, 193-221. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 130.
[520] Barfield, Ray. *A Word from Our Viewers: Reflections from Early Television Audiences*. Westport, Connecticut and London: PRAEGER, 2007, pp. 81-82.
[521] Morse, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
[522] LaFollette, Marcel Chotkowski *Science on the Air. Popularizers and Personalities on Radio and Early Television*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 1.
[523] *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

radio would be gradually displaced as the primary source for entertainment and news by television. In 1946 there were only six commercial television stations and approximately 8000 households had sets. Between the years 1948 and 1955 more than half of all US homes installed a television set. And by the end of the 1950s there were over 400 stations and 90 per cent of US households had television sets.[524]

Television became the main source of shared images and this would have a deep impact in the formation of public opinion. It is important to note how television is always termed as a medium of communication, however Morse points out that it is "derealized" as communication into a one-way, largely recorded transmission.[525] Mander goes as far as to argue that experience itself was being unified to the single behaviour of watching television, where millions of viewers sit separately but are engaged in the same activity at the same time.[526] In his exact words, "We can all be spoken to at the same time, night or day, from a centralized information source. In fact, we are. Everyday a handful of people speak. The rest listen."[527] Television also has another unifying effect, in the sense of flattening all the contents it filters. It results in the unification of segments of widely disparate topics in contrasting expressive moods, "television discourse typically consists of 'stacks' of recursive levels which are usually quite different in look and 'flavor'."[528]

At this point it might be helpful to quote an excerpt of the Commissioner of the FCC's (Federal Communications Commission), Newton Minow, Address to the 39th Annual Conference of the National Broadcasters, Washington (9 May 1961) titled "The Vast Wasteland," to insist on how television's discourse was intimately related to the dissemination of the government's policy regarding atomic weaponry and technological investigation. In his eloquent words, "Ours has been called the jet age, the atomic age, the space age. It is also, I submit, the television age. And just as history will decide whether the leaders of today's world employed the atom to destroy the world or to rebuild it for mankind's benefit, so will history decide whether today's broadcasters employed their powerful voice to enrich the people or debase them."[529] All this leads to the idea of television itself as a powerful weapon, one that has the ability to give

[524] Spigel, Lynn. "Television in the Family Circle. The Popular Reception of a New Medium." In *Logics of Television. Essays in Cultural Criticism*, edited by Patricia Mellencamp, 73-97. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 74; LaFolllette, *op. cit*., p. 214.
[525] Morse, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
[526] Mander, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[527] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[528] Morse, *op. cit.*, p. 206.
[529] As quoted in Spigel, *op*. *cit*., p. 82.

visibility and erase, to shape and omit information, events, desires and fears. Television, to a great extent, is responsible for how the atomic bomb was conceived by regular Americans in the 1950s and of how years later we imagine that era. The official policies surrounding nuclear weapons and atomic energy also set a precedent in what and how television could cover. The Atomic Age with its problematic combination of censorship and public relations would leave a lasting impact, which is why it is safe to say that the directors of the film are not only dealing with the complexities of the 1950s, but also with those of their own time.

3.2.3. THE FILMMAKER'S INFLUENCES

When asked, Jayne loader stated Emile de Antonio, Bruce Conner, Phillippe Mora, the entire *verité* movement, the novelist Robert Coover and the theorists Herbert Schiller and Jerry Mander as the film's influences. She specifically calls the movie "a compilation verité", that is "a compilation film with no voice of God narration and no new footage created by us, the filmmakers."[530] Jayne Loader commented, "so-called Voice of God narration, ubiquitous in documentaries destined for PBS, is insulting to the audience. If you believe in the intelligence of your audience, you don't need to tell them what to think and how to process the material they're seeing'."[531]

Probably of all the filmmakers and authors listed above the most obvious influence would be Emilie de Antonio. He and Bruce Conner are commonly seen as "found-footage patriarchs."[532] Phillippe Mora is less renown, however, he too has produced documentaries with recycled footage tackling difficult and controversial subjects. His film *Swastika* (1973) is similar in technique to *The Atomic Cafe* and the films of Emile de Antonio in the sense that it does not have an overbearing voice of god narration. Instead we encounter multiple narrators, multiple voices and not a guiding, overpowering, interpreting one. What we see in the film *Swastika* is a detailed look at the years of the Third Reich in Germany, it is composed of something rarely seen, sequences of the "reverse side of Nazism", such as bored Hitler Youths mouthing Nazi

[530] www.conelrad.com
[531] Beattie, op. cit., p. 141.
[532] Sandusky, *op. cit.*, p. 19. Emile de Antonio would later learn about Shub, in an interview when talking of his first film of *Point of Order* he states "I was unknowingly imitating somebody long since dead whose work I had never seen – Esther Schub." Crowdus, Gary and Georgakas, Dan. "History Is the Theme of All My Movies: An Interview with Emile De Antonio." *Cineaste* 12, no. 2 (1982): 20-28, p.23.

songs, Goebbels giving out Christmas presents, Hitler opening an art museum, and the home movies of Eva Braun.[533] It is a montage of many different sources depicting Hitler, his inner circle, and the Nazi era. The footage consists of outtakes, newsreels, documentaries, propaganda films and home movies.[534] Images that contrast heavily against the images that have come to represent the Nazi reign in Germany. He does not shy away from the complexities that these images offer, many of which are "placid" sequences of Hitler and his clique relaxing, making small talk and playing with children at the Berghof near Berchesgasden. He lets them breath, develop. Hitler appears less a dictator than a petty bourgeois Austrian. It offers a glimpse of the elite of the Third Reich at play.[535] In these scenes what we get is something more than the one-dimensional depiction of Hitler as a monster, which is precisely the point and has quite a disturbing effect nonetheless.

But if there is a determining filmic influence in *The Atomic Cafe*, it is Emile de Antonio, who has been called "America's foremost radical documentary filmmaker,"[536] whose films have been described by William C. Wees as "critical portraits,"[537] A graduate from Harvard and close friends with the members of the New York School Painters, such as Willem de Kooning, Jasper Jones, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, and Barnett Newmann, and good friends with Andy Warhol, Emile de Antonio started his career as a filmmaker in his forties. As he himself describes, during the 1950s he was "leading the life that any good upper bourgeois might have envied" and it was finding film that changed him, in his own words, "as I started to make these films in the early sixties, I discovered in myself a rapidly escalating political position."[538] He has openly declared that he approaches all of his work from a "consciously left viewpoint."[539] The only documentaries he liked had been made before World War II; he thought that television and the Cold War had taken the content out of documentary. For his first film, *Point of Order!* (1963), he worked with the 188 hours of recordings of the Army-McCarthy hearings that CBS had in its archive, which he had to buy for $50,000. His idea was to take material that already existed and, inspired by

[533] Eubank, Kieth. 1976. "Swastika: A Review." *Film and History* 6 (3):63-65, p. 64.
[534] *Ibid.*, p. 63.
[535] Moorhouse, Roger. 2010. "Swastika." *History Today* 60 (1):59, p. 59.
[536] Crowdus and Georgakas, *op. cit*., p. 21.
[537] Wees, *Found Footage Film*, p. 41.
[538] Weiner, *op. cit*., p. 3.
[539] Crowdus and Georgakas, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

what he called left-wing films from the past, make an anti-McCarthyism statement.[540] For his film *The Year of the Pig* (1968), which tackles the Vietnam War, he searched for footage going as far back as he could.[541] The theme of the film is not only the war itself, but also how all issues regarding the former colony had been recorded and represented in moving images. It was a critique of the coverage of the Vietnam War at the time, in his words, "There is noting as bad that's happened concerning the war as the networks' coverage of if, because it seems as if they're covering the war whereas in fact they're not. The networks have made the American people, in a final way, comfortable with the war – because it appears between commercials, every day; it's become part of our quotidian existence, like armpit commercials."[542] His film *Millhouse: A White Comedy* (1971), centred on the figure of Richard Nixon before the Watergate scandal, has been referred to as a "comic political biography." De Antonio calls it "the first attempt at a real documentary comedy."[543] It was not intended as a personal attack on Nixon, but on "the System, the credibility of the System, by focusing on the obvious and perfect symbol for that System".[544] According to Bruzzi, one consistent facet of de Antonio's work is that his collage method does not attack hate figures such as Richard Nixon or Joseph McCarthy directly, but rather gives them "enough rope by which to hang themselves – turning often favourable original footage on itself."[545]

These three films by de Antonio have in common the use of archival material, based on exhaustive research and a commitment to the left, in their dealing with some of the most controversial political events of his lifetime. Their common theme is history and how it is portrayed. For de Antonio, "Compilation filmmaking lends itself best to history, which is, frankly, the theme of all my films."[546] He influenced many filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s, who decided to start using archival footage, sometimes combining it with interviews, in order to retrieve historical experiences, focusing on submerged histories of labour struggle and Left experiences. He describes his technique as "a collage of people, voices, images, ideas, to develop a story line or a

[540] Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[541] In his own words: "It seemed to me that the most passionate statement that could be made was to make a film that would treat the history of Vietnam as far back as the footage would take it." Crowdus and Georgakas, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
[542] Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 7
[543] Crowdus and Georgakas, *op. cit*., p. 21.
[544] Weiner, Bernard, *op. cit.* , p. 4.
[545] Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[546] Crowdus and Georgakas, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

didactic line, uninterrupted by external narration."[547] And these are precisely features that we encounter in *The Atomic Cafe*. In fact, some of de Antonio's declarations could have been easily pronounced by the members of the Archives Project, such as: "I've always thought that it's wrong to explain things to audiences. The material is there, and interpretations can be made;"[548] or: "I may be wrong about this, but my assumption is that people who have lived in the electronic world can make those leaps from one time and place to another."[549] When explaining why he avoids using a voice of God narration he states, "What I'm doing is presenting the real authorities rather than a hollow voice like Cronkite. Cronkite, like most narrators, reads what writers write. That's a little disembodied for me and removed from fact, news, documentary. I'm looking for the integral fact in which the man who says it is the man who wrote it, thought it, believed it, experienced it."[550] Which is also what the directors of *The Atomic Cafe* have done. Like de Antonio's films, *The Atomic Cafe* eschews linearity of argument and, according to Bruzzi, seeks to be democratic and not overly guiding. [551] Another essential issue for de Antonio was that the audio-visual history of his time was the television out-take. He believed that television is content free not because it is regulated but because it is a commodity,[552] and that "the real history of he United States in the Cold War is out-takes. The networks shoot but don't televise the raw spots which reveal."[553] An assumption that is shared by the Archives Project, as is exemplified in many sequences suchas the one depicting Truman's laugh before his public address announcing the bombing of Hiroshima. De Antonio's method, his way of using old existing footage to construct out of it an alternative, or outright contrary, account from that which it possessed originally, has appropriately been christened "*radical scavenging*" by BernardWiener.[554] It has to do with what Baron termed "intentional disparity", one of the essential characteristics of the "archive effect."

Another important influence is Bruce Conner, who is credited with being among the first of the post war generation to "enter the image database of American culture and create films that are simultaneously personal and political."[555] He was fascinated both

[547] Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
[548] *Ibid*, p. 9.
[549] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[550] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[551] Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[552] Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[553] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[554] *Ibid.*
[555] Sandusky, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

by stock images that the studios would use time and again in their films, as well as television and the possibility it offered of switching between channels. But overall, he was especially attentive to the images that were deemed "junk". In his words, "I became aware that there was a 'universal movie' that was being made all the time!" and "…anything which was taken for granted as not serious, not art, just things that are thrown away, were exactly what I paid attention to." He followed the philosophical premise "if you want to know what's going on in a culture, look at what everybody takes for granted. Put your attention on that, rather than on what they *want* to show you."[556]

Some of his most interesting films are *A Movie* (1958), *Cosmic Ray* (1962) *Report* (1967), *Crossroads* (1976) and *Devo: Mongoloid* (1978). Probably the most famous and influential one among them is *A Movie* (1958), which is contemporaneous to the material used in *The Atomic Cafe*. It was influenced by the television medium, trailers, experimental film, and dream sequences of Hollywood films. Conner recurred to the stocks of footage library because he was interested in the footage that the studios used time and again. In *A Movie* we find scenes of atomic explosions and consumer products, which are used to speak of an "American dream world of empty desires, of utopia turned apocalyptic".[557] However, he defends, "My films are the 'real world.' It's not a fantasy. It's not a found object. This is the stuff that I see as the phenomena around me. At least that's what I call the 'real world' (…) If you listen to a news program on the radio it may report ten events in a row. It's no different than *A Movie*. Something absurd next to a catastrophe next to speculation next to a kind of instruction on how you're supposed to think about some political or social thing."[558]

Wees uses this film as an example of his category of "collage," because of its thematic complexity and in it he sees a critique of representation. For him, it provokes a self-conscious, creative, and critical viewing of cinematic representations, especially when they are representations that were originally intended to be seen as unmediated signifiers of reality.[559] I find it surprising that Wees does not see the same in *The Atomic Cafe*, where these features are even more apparent for me. According to Russell, among the themes that *A Movie* introduces to found-footage filmmaking is an epic sense of historical time. She sees in Conner's perspective a warning or prophecy at the advent of

[556] Wees, "Speaking of Found Footage", p. 78-79.
[557] Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-7.
[558] Wees, "Speaking of Found Footage", p. 85.
[559] Wees, "Found footage and questions of representation", p. 43-45.

television, of a media-saturated world, which she relates to the theoretical debates of postmodernism. She sees a clear link between the Apocalypse and the instability of representation, which leads her to argue, "the film introduces the key thematic of 'the real' as an endangered sphere of representation in the accelerated pace of modernity."[560]

As for Jayne Loader's reference to "the entire *verité* movement", that is probably the most striking referent. In fact, she calls the film a "compilation verité", which at first glance seems like an oxymoron. As Paul Arthur argues there is a clear opposition between *verité* and found footage documentaries. Filmic structures featuring found footage tend to privilege the recognition of conscious construction over assumptions of "unmediated" presentation, which is commonly understood as one of the key characteristics of *verité*. With found footage tropes of discontinuity as expressive of the bond between past and present take precedence over illusions of temporal harmony, whereas for *verité* means to register the image as temporally and spatially singular. V*erité* admits that images are capable of eliciting multiple responses, but found footage adds that the field of meaning shifts according to context and syntax: "that field cannot be universalized or freed from historical determination."[561] Arthur goes as far as to argue: "collage constitutes an antidote to *verite*'s unabashedly individualist (and performative) encounter with social reality."[562] This opposing view of recycling footage and *verité* is not only found in theoretical discourse, de Antonio eloquently comments on *verité*: "Whose verité? No one can fault the development of fast, light, mobile equipment. What is wrong is the space the best known practitioners of c-v occupy today: publicity films for rock groups. (Stones, Beatles, Monterey, Woodstock, Altamont.)"[563] However, it is necessary to single out a difference that is sometimes overlooked, and that is that there are two distinctly different "traditions" of early *verité* work. On the one hand, there is the French *cinéma vérité* movement, of which Jean Rouch is probably the most recognizable director, and its approach was very unlike what in the United States has come to be known as modern television *vérité*. Rouch and associates showed the filmmaking process intervening in the events filmed, Corner even

[560] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
[561] Paul Arthur, "The Status of Found Footage," p. 60.
[562] *Ibid.*, p. 60.
[563] Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

speaks of "open interventionism" and "declared authorship."[564] Whereas the "direct cinema" directors in the United States (such as D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, Frederick Wiseman and Robert Drew) gave the viewers "the sense of unmediated access to the contingencies of an actuality uncompromised by the camera."[565] It is this strand of *verité* turned into a sub-genre of documentary television within American and British television, this idea of non-interventionist and observationalist *verité* that became used interchangeably with "fly on the wall.[566]

Cinéma verité did hold certain stylistic similarities with direct cinema; philosophically and functionally, however, it is quite opposite from direct cinema: the filmmaker is not an observer but a catalyst and participant, recognizing that the act of filming changes the event being filmed (one can hear them questioning, dialoguing, meditating or even see them in the film).[567] The *cinéma verité* filmmaker's own engagement with the material of actual events and people analyses and sometimes transforms it to such a degree that "film truth emerges as the documented truth of a personal meditation" in many occasions they are "constructed as personal essays rather than as objective analyses, and they have become a popular form of documentary inquiry."[568] Sobchack and Sobchack seem to find a middle ground for *verité* and compilation in what they call the "epic documentary". They contend, "Its combination of compilation film techniques (the juxtaposition of archival footage) with cinema verité techniques (primarily the interview) results in a unique structure; both past and present become temporal become temporal realities in the film (doesn't this always happen to a certain extent)."[569] Their example for this kind of documentary is Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity*.

As for the literary influences that Loader mentions we find the novelist Robert Coover, who was inspired by popular culture and entertainment. He believed that the pop culture that people absorbed in childhood kept affecting the way they responded to the world for the rest of their lives. In some of his stories he recurred to well-known actors and films, but with an anti-nostalgic strategy. He gave these public figures a twist

[564] Corner, John. *The Art of Record. A Critical Introduction to Documentary*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996, p. 43.
[565] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[566] *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.
[567] Sobchack and Sobchack, *op. cit.*, p. 356.
[568] *Ibid.*, p. 357.
[569] *Ibid.*, p. 358.

and rendered the reader's co-creative activity unsettling and confusing, tilting the assumptions he or she makes in order orient him or herself in the text.[570] What is ridiculed when he recurs to these famous people is not themselves but the "homogenising myth or legend of amusement and entertainment". His work is a work of parody as Hutcheon defines it: "imitation with critical ironic difference." According to Pughe, we also find a self-reflective dimension of some of his fiction.[571] Probably his work with most elements in common with *The Atomic Cafe* is the novel *The Public Burning*.[572] It is centred on the trial and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, which is recounted mixing fact and fiction. In the novel, the Rosenbergs are condemned to burn in Times Square, which we know to be false since they were sentenced to the electric chair and their sentence was carried out in Sing Sing. For Pughe, there is a kind of "forcing of a controversial series of historical events into a seemingly unambiguous and coherent structure foregrounds the way in which (historical) narrative imposes a moral meaning on reality,"[573] similar to *The Atomic Cafe*, where the directors bring out the moral meaning imposed on the representations of nuclear bombs and the nuclear tests in propaganda films and the media. Coover's novel uses pre-existing fictional constructs (such as television shows and films) to create narrative frames that suggest to the reader a particular pattern of reception, most often laughter.[574] Again this is something we also find in *The Atomic Cafe*. Coover's novel juxtaposes two distinct narrative versions of the event, the first is done through the narration of general chronicler and the second is a fictionalized narration by Richard Nixon. In addition, between these two narrators there are three "Intermezzi."[575] The general chronicler comes to stand for the multitude of public discourses unified into one single voice, as though there were no contradiction or conflict between them. *The Atomic Cafe* works through a multiplicity of public discourses, especially those that echo dominant ideologies, however *The Atomic Cafe* insinuates some small cracks in the discourse, while still maintaining the crushing overbearance of the general official position of the government and the military industry. It is important to point out how Coover's general chronicler's voice is callous, cliché-ridden and distinctly male. As are most, if not all, of

[570] This is the case with his story "Charlie in the House of Rue", Pughe, Thomas. *Comic Sense. Reading Robert Coover*. Basel: Stanley Elkin, Philip Roth, ISCELL, Springer Basel AG, 1994, pp. 47-48.
[571] *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.
[572] Coover, Robert. *The Public Burning*. New York: Viking Press, 1977.
[573] Pughe, *op. cit.,* pp. 59-60, cit.p. 60.
[574] *Ibid.*, p. 60.
[575] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

the narrators in the The Archives Project's film. In *The Public Burning*, the strength of the political system becomes almost identical with the know-how of the entertainment industry. What we find is a compilation of cliché and stereotype, stupidity and arrogance, patriotism and popular entertainment, which ends up emphasising the limits of historical discourse in the United States of the 1950s.[576]

The other writers that Loader mentions are theorists Herbert Schiller and Jerry Mander. The latter is an activist and former public relations and advertising executive and his most famous book, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (1978), makes a case against television, based on his contention that as a medium, it counts with a series of problems inherent to its technology that makes it incredibly dangerous. He talks of the "replacement of experience," a change in the way people receive information and in the way they experience and understand the world, by which interpretations and representations of the world were being accepted as experience.[577] He also speaks of the "unification of experience," by which he means that experience itself was being unified in one single behaviour: watching television.[578] "We can all be spoken to at the same time, night or day, from a centralized information source. In fact, we are. Every day a handful of people speak. The rest listen."[579] He arrived to the conclusion that there is ideology in the technology itself, that television is not neutral nor is it subject to change, and that television has no democratic potential.[580]

Herbert Schiller was a founding figure of international cultural political economy. His books from the 1960s are an example of scholarly commitment to liberatory cultural definitions, which continue to inspire; and his later work endeavoured to account for readership protocols and the globalization mythology of the new world order, towards which he is dubious.[581] Some of his most relevant books are *Mass Communication and American Empire* (1967), *The Mind Managers* (1973), *Communication and Cultural Domination* (1976), *Who Knows?* (1981). From the late 1960s he emphasised the significance of age-old capitalist activities. He insisted on the primacy of business imperatives in the realm of information. But probably his most

[576] *Ibid.*, p. 69.
[577] Mander, *op. cit.,* p. 24.
[578] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[579] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[580] *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
[581] Miller, Toby. *Technologies of Truth. Cultural Citizenship and the Popular Media*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 51.

influential work is *Culture Inc.* (1989), in which he warned of two major trends: the takeover of public space and public institutions in the US, and US corporate domination of cultural life abroad, especially in the developing nations. He writes of a deep and underlying element predating the Second World War, but that becomes more pronounced after it, which has been the phenomenal growth and expanding influence of the private business corporation. Schiller argues, "Through all the political and social changes of the last fifty years, the private corporate sector in the American economy has widened its economic, political, and cultural role in domestic and international activities. Moreover, this consolidation of corporate power has taken place alongside a parallel decline in the influence of once important forces in American life – independent farmers, organized labor, and strong urban consciousness."[582] He defends that for many in the United States the two nuclear bombs that ended of the Second World War heralded a new age, yet unlike the atomic bombs, the forces that actually contributed to changing the lives of most Americans in the postwar period had been developing for decades: the development of industrial power and the business system. He argues, in 1989, that the elevation of the authority of American business beyond the national to a world arena is one of the central features of global geopolitics of the last fifty years.[583] One of his contentions is that the consolidation of power of big business was in part possible through the use of anticommunism to control labour, as well as to divert the general public from the expansionist policy of American business. The fear that communism generated was bound up with the population's deep desire for postwar stability and prosperity. Another, related, contributing factor was the spread of depoliticized living space, such as suburbanization.[584] Schiller sees anticommunism as a sophisticated policy, formulated to satisfy many of the most urgent requirements of the world-expansive American enterprise system.[585] Anticommunism also set the parameters of discussion and policy; larger issues of the social order could hardly be expected to receive critical attention. Thus, the management of the economy, the goals of production, the safeguarding of the environment, the use of nuclear energy, and public versus private sector interests received short shrift.[586]

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[582] Schiller, Herbert. *Culture Inc. The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 3.
[583] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
[584] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[585] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[586] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Another essential feature of the cultural industries according to Schiller is their deeply structured and pervasive ideological character, "the heavy public consumption of cultural products and services and the contexts in which most of them are provided represent a daily, if not hourly, diet of systemic values". They are commodities and ideological products that embody the rules and values of the market system that produced them.[587] One of Schiller's most important claims is that privatization mobilizes the state differently by selling off public space and regulated markets to the private sector, limiting the range of discourse and narrowing the space for dissent.[588]

3.3. THE 1950S AS SEEN BY THE 1980S

3.3.1. INTRODUCTION

The Atomic Cafe might focus on the imagery of the late 1940s and 1950s, but it could not have been more timely, providing what Cany was described as "some of the background for what appears to be a continuation of what might be called nuclear-war optimism today [1982] – the unprovable assumption that nuclear wars can be fought on a limited scale without making the planet uninhabitable."[589]

I concur with Stella Bruzzi, who argues "*The Atomic Café* is predicated upon a simple central thesis: that the government's and establishment's deliberately misleading and scare-mongering representation of the threat of nuclear war in the 1950s is ripe for ironic reassessment."[590] And with Beattie who defends that the humour and insight derive from an historical perspective, which determinates the images of the family, investing them with meanings derivable only from the distance of the early 1980s. "In this way the film profitably constructs a dialectic of past and present which reflects on current conditions as it reframes past events. The historical revisionist approach is, then, pursued as a politically committed contribution to informing the present."[591] Humour

[587] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[588] Z Zimmermann, Patricia Rodden *States of Emergency. Documentaries, Wars, Democracies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 48.
[589] Canby, *op. cit.*
[590] Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.
[591] Beattie, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

plays an essential role in the film, and its humour is time related. In first place, because the temporal distance provides perspective, this distance underscores the irrationality behind the idea of surviving a nuclear holocaust and reinforces the black humour.[592] The directors thought the material was funny and that they could make it even funnier by editing.[593] The Archives Project are not the only ones to note how some sequences are best left alone, filmmaker Ken Jacobs has said as much, to what William C. Wees adds if "left-over" sequences from the past are "perfect left alone," it is "not because they are unrecognized gems of cinematic art, but because their very artlessness exposes them to more critical – and more amusing – readings than their original makers intended or their original audiences were likely to produce."[594]

But time is also effective in another sense, that of duration. Some of the scenes are extended to a surprising length; iconic images are now inscribed in larger sequences, such as the inclusion of Truman's laugh before the announcement of the bombing of Hiroshima. Mimicking Emile de Antonio's technique of giving the protagonists "enough rope to hang themselves."[595] And our time as viewers is extended too; we get to see (through) the images flashing before us. It creates time to reflect, it opens time for us by looking to past images and giving them a certain kind of, if not pause, length. The old images are made anew, we do not need to register them as new, we are given the chance to expand our thoughts on them as old familiar images, which come to be seen in a way they could have not have been possible before. Time passes as we watch, time has passed since the images were produced, but thought still needs to unfold, and it is this last space that is opened up to us.

Duration holds a special relation to thinking in/with/through cinema. For Deleuze, having an idea in cinema had to do with creating blocks of movement/duration, just as the content of philosophy was to create concepts. According to him, creators (filmmakers, philosophers or scientists) have a creative task, and within this task they do only what they *need* to do. Cinematographic ideas provide a veritable transformation of elements at the level of cinema. As an example of an idea in cinema he mentions the dissociation of sight and sound, as can be found in films by Hans-

[592] *Ibid.*, p. 142.
[593] www.conelrad.com
[594] Wees, *Recycled Images*, pp. 7-8.
[595] According to Bruzzi, "One vivid, consistent facet of de Antonio's work is that his collage method does not attack hate figures such as Richard Nixon, Joseph McCarthy or Colonel Patton directly, but rather gives them enough rope by which to hang themselves – turning often favourable original footage in on itself." Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Jürgen Syberberg, Straub and Huillet, and Marguerite Duras. What is crucial for him is that having an idea is not on the order of communication. Communication would be the transmission and propagation of a piece of information and, he argues, when you are informed you are told what you are supposed to believe. And more important than believing is behaving as if you believe, which makes information a system of control.[596] *The Atomic Cafe*'s source material is made of "pieces of information." It is important to take into account that what is paramount here is that it is irrelevant if information is or not correct, accurate, or even true, one is simply supposed to believe it. Television, which offers cuts and pastes at certain speed, confronts the viewers with quite an overwhelming amount of information. When that information is spread out, when it is granted duration, something happens.

A society of control, in Foucaultian terms, no longer passes through structures of confinement, since control is not a discipline. As one possible example, Deleuze speaks of the highway, which does not enclose people, one can drive "freely" without being confined and yet one is still being controlled.[597] To all this, Deleuze opposes the idea of "counterinformation," but specifies how it is only useful when it becomes an act of resistance. And, for him, an act of resistance has two sides, human and art, that is, it can be a human struggle or a work of art.[598] To think in Deleuzian terms is an act of resistance. To have an idea means to create, and this is done out of necessity, and what is done out of necessity is a struggle and produces a potentiality. He defends that in cinema what a filmmaker creates is a block of movement/duration. To think, in these terms, is to consider and select what one believes, to create is to put forward something more, something other, than information, a potentiality, a dialogue.

This is one of the reasons why *The Atomic Cafe* is so interesting, it weaves pieces of information together, reversing them just by showing them again, making their intended message lose its meaning, the time that has passed and the duration and extent to which they are put to makes them impossible to be believed. The film offers a chance to laugh at the images; it takes all its sanctimonious aspects away from them and offers the viewer a chance to *think* them. There is something really serious in them, but it is not where their makers had stressed it. The seriousness is displaced.

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[596] Deleuze, Gilles. 1998. "Having an Idea in Cinema (On the Cinema of Straub-Huilet)".
[597] *Ibid.*
[598] *Ibid.,* pp. 17-18.

The film makes use of two contradictory but complementary mechanisms: saturation and ellipsis. Saturation replicates the redundancy common to propaganda in general, as well as the overabundance of nostalgic artefacts marketed by the entertainment industry, as well as the images of the 50s prosperity. It might be 1950s imagery, but it is the incessant flow of images in the style of the 1980s television broadcasting that we are seeing, their disposability. The filmmakers are talking about present times through images of the past. Nicolas Bourriaud (following Huyghe) questions the popular belief of being saturated of images, stating that in truth we are subjected to the misery of a few images or, to be more precise, many images but that are roughly the same, which end up producing one solid, supposedly unproblematic, image. Hence, the need to produce counter-images.[599]

3.3.2. SATURATION

What we have is the re-edition of the image of a time. A time that seemed obsessed with stockpiling. Stockpiling of weapons, of images, of consumer goods. All the sources used point in one direction: an imminent and unavoidable threat that, according to official representation, can only be surmounted by obedience to marked guidelines, striving to maintain order.

According to Boyle *The Atomic Cafe*'s principle targets are political leaders, such as Truman, Nixon and Lyndon Johnson.[600] However, I do not see the target in such individualistic terms, I would say it is something that involves these public figures, but which scope is infinitely larger. As in de Antonio's critical political films, the people depicted are not the target, not Nixon and not McCarthy, but the entire system, which they have come to represent. The film shows subtle cracks in what seems to be a solid image block. By seeing so many similar images put together, we are able to see slight differences among people and voices, we are able to see the nuances instead of that all too familiar 1950s image of the "American dream." For example, not all politicians are shown in the same light, Nixon is shown as a relentless ambitious anti-Red inquisitor,[601] whereas president Dwight D. Eisenhower, who by no means is more sympathetic to

[599] Nicolas Bourriaud, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
[600] Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
[601] Auty, Chris. "The Atomic Cafe." *Monthly Film Bulletin* XLIX, no. 587 (December 1982): 289. p. 289.

political dissidents, seems to address the real perils of the Cold War more carefully, as can be seen in the speech where "he stresses that science has "outrun" our social, political and intellectual institutions."[602]

3.3.2.1. The Battle on the Image Front

In the 1950s the government treated the nuclear threat as a public relations problem. "The Atomic Energy Commission had been given a free hand, with all the authority and secrecy of a top military project, and public dissent was addressed with a blitz of officially-sanctioned information," which makes Erickson speaks of "out-of-control propaganda methods used to 'sell' nuclear complacency."[603] Controlling the atom politically meant controlling information about atomic science. What we find in the years following World War II are two approaches to scientific information: the first, a defensive attitude that created a heavy censorship, and the second, a proactive approximation as witnessed by the proliferation of public relations activities and education policies.[604] LaFollette sees these different approaches as contradictory, however, although different in nature they overlapped and, in practice, functioned in a complementary manner.

Many of the source films of *The Atomic Cafe* (the educational and Public Service Informational Films, as well as the military training and debriefing films) were shown to "captive audiences", such as school children, people in work gatherings, and soldiers receiving instruction; and others were broadcast.[605] Many Americans (mainly students and soldiers) did not have a choice and were subjected to the US government's attempts to persuade its citizens that by following simple procedures they would safely survive a nuclear war. Beattie notes, "The absurdity of the proposition is compounded by the fact that in the immediate post Second World War era, one which witnessed the annihilation by nuclear weapons of the majority of the populations of the Japanese cities

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[602] Canby, *op. cit.*
[603] Wiener, Jon. "The Omniscient Narrator and the Unreliable Narrator: The Case of the Atomic Cafe." *Film & History* 37, no. 1 (2007): 73-76, p. 73.
[604] LaFollette, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
[605] Erickson, *op. cit*.

of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the government would expect its citizens to believe its nuclear propaganda."[606] This is precisely what *The Atomic Cafe* addresses.

All this has to be taken account within the context of burgeoning superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, in their fight for identity in a post-war world, where they shifted positions from former World War II allies against Nazism into notorious Cold War foes.[607] The United States, in its struggle for identity, was fighting a crucial battle at home attempting to impose an image that was meant to be unquestionable, self-evident. This fight can be seen as one of a discourse of surfaces, but those surfaces had very deep implications. What *The Atomic Cafe* does is target that very superficiality, that flat surface, scavenging to find the bumps and shrivels, as it were, that point elsewhere and hint to contradictions and muted nuances that were present in the 1950s. The film also is speaking of its own time, the renewed belligerent anti-red rhetoric of the early 1980s and the medium through which it is transmited, television.

We could interpret the film as an archaeological endeavour, as many found footage films have been seen, but also as an investigation in cultural studies. For the directors are not only showing us the construction of the image of the atomic age, but also its dissemination and the ubiquity of the moving image, something that might have started then with the expansion of television sets in American homes, but that has increased with the development of technology during the second half of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first. Russell takes issue with the thought of "archival practices" as a kind of archaeology, however tempting, because she believes found footage is a discourse of surfaces, where "Origins and sources are effaced, producing an image sphere with a highly ambivalent relation to history," on the one hand, and *The Atomic Cafe* embraces "the kitsch aesthetic of lack of depth."[608] It is hard to imagine an image sphere that is not ambivalent, it seems inherent to recorded images and that is precisely one of the main concerns and strengths of certain found footage films. On the other hand, this kitsch aesthetic is not frivolous, this embrace is revealing. The directors go well beyond an exercise in aesthetics. Russell argues, "All images become documentary images once their original contexts are stripped away."[609] But that does not render them flat; not all images are the same, and the different uses they can be

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[606] Beattie, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.
[607] Varney, Christopher "Review of the Atomic Cafe." *Vancouver Island University website* (2002) http://web.viu.ca/davies/H323Vietnam/AtomicCafe.reviews.htm (Last accessed September 10 2015).
[608] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
[609] *Ibid.*

put to do not have the same effect. I disagree with Russell in her positioning of found footage films as a discourse of surfaces, in the sense that it seems to exclude other possibilities. Recycling footage can be done in multiple ways and what makes *The Atomic Cafe* so interesting is its layering of images, the essayistic nature of this construction, which is what enables a critical relation with history or, more precisely, with historical traces. *The Atomic Cafe* is an in depth study of images written with the images themselves. It does not have the same effect as a music video or a television ad made of found footage, even if they are all based on the same technique of reediting.

3.3.2.2. The Rhetoric of Danger

> "(W)e see America being taught that its prosperity is threatened and that preparation for massive retaliation is essential. A time capsule of kitschy music and embarrassingly naïve visual mementos, the compilation of film clips creates a vision that sees through the surface of a nation gripped by fear and denial." Glenn Erickson [610]

This image battle fought in the United States leaned on two complementary discourses: America's victory and ever-growing prosperity, on one hand, and, on the other, the "Red threat," which according to the image making of the time was its biggest peril. Both of these discourses sunk their roots in World War II, the victory discourse has a direct link to the propaganda efforts of the war and its outcome, the prosperity it proclaimed was part of an effort to re-conduct life in time of peace, and the "Red threat" soon replaced the Nazi menace, using the same mechanism to represent the former as they had represented the latter during the war. In Boyle's words "The Nazi menace is fast replaced by the Communist threat, and maps now oozing with Red aggression recall the famous maps in Capra's 'Why We Fight' series."[611]

Dana Polan has argued that the discursive landscape of postwar America is exemplary of a dialectic of power and paranoia. Against, and in response to, the emergence of nuclear weapons, Americanized psychoanalysis, social science, and consumer capitalism developed parallel discourses of hysteria, paranoia, delinquency, sexual excess, and anxiety. The image bank of this period shows as much, as television

[610] Erickson, *op. cit*.
[611] Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

and film were deeply implicated in the network of new technologies and fears.[612] Polan's notion of paranoia "is not an eternally abstract condition but a specifically social way of responding to new permutations in everyday perception and possibility."[613] This paranoia is more visible in the 1980s because of the time that has passed since the production of the images at hand, but it still has much to say about the discursive landscape of the 1980s and of today, where we are still subjected to strategies of scaremongering. "Today, terms like Terror and Evil are used as media weapons to stifle the truth. People don't want Truth or justice, they want to drive new cars, win the ballgame, and be assured that God belongs to them alone."[614]

The representation of the Cold War is heavily influenced by the representations of World War II. According to Polan "the war can seem a catalyst that works to minimize difference, that rewrites American social life within the limits of an ideology of unity and commitment that a number of discourses (ads, radio, some films, the internalization of media in everyday psychology) work to prescribe sharply."[615] He speaks of a "science of home front fighting," of how "through the mediation of shared concern, the home front becomes another version of the war."[616] The 1950s continue this discourse of war as well as this instrumentalization of the media, which is writing reality within the framework of a singular, closed set of values.[617] It might be useful to remember one of Schiller's key assertions, that the fear that communism generated was bound up with the population's deep desire for postwar stability and prosperity.[618]

Polan states that war ideology constitutes what in structuralist terms could be called a *combinatoire*, that is, a fixed number of elements or terms that can enter into sets of permutations, and one strong wartime permutation involves the connection of an ambiguous present to a clear and precise future; which is a particular mythology of small-town America[619] *The Atomic Cafe* hits this on the head. It visibilizes how the channels that are informing of an alleged threat, that are disseminating civic models of grace and correctness, are the same channels used for publicizing consumer goods. They are not only linked through their means of communication, one seems to involve

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[612] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 242.
[613] Polan, Dana. *Power & Paranoia. History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 15.
[614] Erickson, *op. cit*.
[615] Polan, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
[616] *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
[617] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[618] Schiller, op. cit. p. 14.
[619] Polan, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-48.

the other. It seems to suggest that if you do not believe the official message and measure up to the models being set in them, you are not worthy of the beautiful glossy products advertised; what is more, you can even put that entire lifestyle in jeopardy.

The war had already posed new needs for American representation, and the post-war moment would be represented alternatively as a continuation of these needs and as an abandonment of the wartime way of life.[620] What it all came to was a growing understanding of the fabrication of the visual evidence as a tool in ideological warfare. The enemy had changed but the fear and wartime discourse was maintained. "During the Cold War, 'America' was constructed in the media as a culturally specific domain of family values, democracy, and free enterprise with the small town and suburban nuclear family as its focal point."[621] And it was done redundantly, for "one of the central rhetorical strategies of propaganda is *redundancy*."[622]

In the transition from wartime to a time of peace, one of the most noticeable mutations was the change of the everyday landscape, from "small-town America" to suburbia. Dana Polan noted the importance placed on small-town America during the war effort, he argues that it functions formally as a vast source of semantic elements, such as hamburger joints, pets, the girl left behind. It is a mythology of sorts that counts with various rhetorical strategies that work to make those meanings appear as the inevitable sense of things, and works by the logic of appearing to have no overriding logic at all, there is no explicit enunciation of a message of propaganda, just the chronicling of everyday life small towns.[623] The suburbs came to represent something new, something that was created in body and mind after World War II, and the place to get the ball to start rolling was advertising. For Jerry Mander the suburbs are "capitalism's ideally separated buying units" and are built profitably, what was needed were humans who liked and wanted suburbs, what he calls "suburb-people."[624] For Margaret Morse, the freeway, the shopping mall and television constitute the realms of everyday life that are a part of a socio-historical nexus of institutions which grew together after World War II. She sees them as analogues, in the sense that all three are modes of transportation and exchange in everyday life.[625] They imply a partial loss of touch with the here and now, she sees them as *distraction*, in the sense that they imply

[620] Polan, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[621] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 242.
[622] Polan, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
[623] *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
[624] Mander, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
[625] Morse, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

practices and skills that can be performed semi-automatically; driving, shopping and watching TV are the "barley acknowledged ground of everyday experience."[626] They imply a "dreamlike *displacement*", a separation from their surroundings. "Suburbia is itself an attempt via serial production to give *everyman* and *everywife* the advantages of a city at the edge of the natural world."[627]

The Atomic Cafe echoes the interrelation of these "systems", the mall, the freeway and television. It becomes clear in many moments of the film, but perhaps one of the most evident ones is during the Eisenhower's speech on America's greatness and the challenge of the Atomic Age, which is tactically posited over shots of fast-food joints, supermarkets, and images of car culture.[628] There is a constant idealization of this new way of life and a constant fear of it being in danger. However, there had not been any kind of incident to inspire such fear, it was not based on a prior experience, it all stemmed from a discursive experience. One explanation might go back to World War II. Dana Polan, when speaking of "wartime unity," speaks of the effect that the attack of Pearl Harbor had on Americans and notes how it was not "really" an experience, it was more of a discursive experience. It came to Americans already shaped as a representation. Except for a few people, it took place as a symbol, and it is precisely its force as a symbol that brought about a sense of unity to a divided nation. What is more, it was an event in the past that seemed to continue to live as a unifying force in the present and future.[629] This idea of threats that are experienced on a discursive level is key to understanding both the propaganda of the Cold War era and *The Atomic Cafe*'s effectiveness, as well as to the many threats we continue to be alerted to by different audiovisual means. It is in this sense that the film is a brilliant exercise of cultural studies concerning the Cold War years. It offers a profound analysis of and response to the audiovisual discourses that the cold war generated, which in turn also created the Cold War visually. It is for these reasons that I contend it has essayistic qualities, by replicating the discourse of propaganda and that of the tools of its dissemination.

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[626] *Ibid.*, p. 196.
[627] *Ibid.*, p. 197.
[628] Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 39
[629] Polan, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

3.3.2.3. An Audience of Consumers: The "Nuclear" Family *As Seen on TV*

> "Those miniature dramas, television commercials, promised to make life simple, beautiful, exciting, more colorful, and less painful; and many a product's packaging and print advertising proclaimed, 'As seen on TV!'" Ray Barfield[630]

Morse speaks of television as something that is dislocated and *disengaged*. It is derealized as communication, that is, the primacy of discourse in television representation is not anchored as enunciation in a reality of community and discursive exchange. Television's enunciations are separated temporaly and spatially into one-way, largely redorded, transmission.[631] She speaks of a new referentiality, one that only works within three analogues: the mall, the freeway and television. Television seems to reference itself, this "nationwide distribution system for symbols in anticipation and reinforcement of a national culture presented not only as desirable but as already realized somewhere else."[632] The mall is the site in which to cash in the promises of commodities seen on television, and the freeway makes the consumption style of suburban living and shopping feasible.

Within this context, the importance of advertising in broadcasting cannot be stressed enough. Even in radio's early days, programs became the glue that bound together advertisements.[633] Which is not surprising since, as LaFollette states, "Broadcasting derived its income from advertising, which required networks to sustain the status quo, that is, to 'avoid whatever deviates too sharply from what the listener already accepts'."[634] And in the television era, the broadcasting industry became ever more profit driven. "Rather than delivering content the public deserved or needed, the networks translated public whims directly into plotlines calculated to attract millions of viewers (and therefore advertiser sales)."[635] The first major content analysis of programming (1949-1951) showed that advertising was consuming 20 per cent of television time.[636] Thus, television constituted itself as an industry chiefly preoccupied with delivering profitable entertainment[637]

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[630] Barfield, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
[631] Morse, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
[632] *Ibid.*, p. 210.
[633] LaFollette, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[634] *Ibid.*, p. 243.
[635] *Ibid.*, p. 236-237.
[636] *Ibid.*, p. 225.
[637] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

Television adds used a reassuring pictorial convention of the family at home, "especially in the years immediately following the war when advertisers were in the midst of their reconversion campaigns, channelling the country back from the personal sacrifices and domestic upheavals of World War II to a peacetime economy based on consumerism and family values."[638] As Mander recounts, everyone was relieved that the war was over and was expecting things to get back to normal, but what exactly was normal? Memories of the Depression persisted and many ordinary people were aware that the war had alleviated the Depression; it had given men jobs as soldiers and women jobs as factory workers. In 1946 government and industry started making pronouncements about "regearing" American life to consume commodities. Thus, a new vision was born, one that equated the good life with consumer goods.[639] People had to be convinced that life without all these new products was undesirable and unpatriotic, they had to forget the rationing of the war years. Television was the perfect means to deliver the life-style that advertising promoted. It was in this frame that the "nuclear family" was idealized to a greater extent than ever before, because the family was the ideal consumption unit.[640]

This image was quite different to the experiences of GIs returning home and the difficult time of readjustment to civilian life. Women were given an especially constraining solution to the changing roles of gender and sexual identity. After being encouraged to enter the traditional male occupations during the war, they were told to return to their homes. The sharp discrepancies between wartime and postwar life resulted in a set of ideological and social contradictions concerning the construction of gender and the family unit. Illustrations of domestic bliss and consumer prosperity presented a soothing alternative to the tensions of life after World War II.[641] Television, and radio before it, flattened content and ignored in viewers' personal interests, life experiences, or values. To the broadcasting industry the individual listener or viewer became irrelevant. "Media consumers were interchangeable as long as they fit a particular demographic profile. Moreover they were perceived as simultaneously *buyers and the thing sold*."[642]

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[638] Spigel, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
[639] Mander, *op. cit.*, p. 135-136, cit.p. 136.
[640] *Ibid.*, p. 137.
[641] Spigel, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
[642] LaFollette, *op. cit.* p. 237.

Television itself was a staple home fixture in US adds in magazines, even before most Americans could receive a signal. More than reflecting a social reality, it preceded it. Television became the central figure in images of the American house and the cultural symbol of family life. In 1954, *McCall's* magazine coined the term "togetherness", which stressed the importance of family unity, and was symptomatic of discourses aimed at the housewife. Television was seen as "a kind of household cement which promised to reassemble the splintered lives of families who had been separated during the war. It was also meant to reinforce the new suburban family unit which had left most of its extended family behind in the city."[643] However, as Morse points out, here we find a paradox, between mass communication and social isolation, this pictorial "togetherness" contrasts with "the increasing functional isolation and spatial segmentation of individuals and families into private worlds which are then mediated into larger and larger entities by new forms of communication."[644]

The depiction of nuclear families in *The Atomic Cafe* offers some of its funniest moments. In Beattie's eloquent words, "The humour and insight here derives from an historical perspective which overdetermines the images of the family, investing them with meanings derivable only from the distance of the early 1980s. In this way the film profitably constructs a dialectic of past and present which reflects on current conditions as it reframes past events. The historical revisionist approach is, then, pursued as a politically committed contribution to informing the present."[645] One of the key aspects of the nuclear family, as depicted in the film, is the claustrophobic role of the traditional mother within it. In the images of the time, her duties are crystal clear: unpaid and unrecognised housework, which is best defined by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English as quoted in a film review by Jayne Loader, "Housework is maintenance and restoration: the daily restocking of the shelves and return of each cleaned and repaired object to its starting point in the family game of disorder. After a day's work, no matter how tiring, the housewife has produced no tangible object-except, perhaps, dinner; and that will disappear in less than half the time it took to prepare. She is not supposed to make anything, but to buy, and then to prepare or conserve what has been bought, dispelling dirt and depreciation as they creep up. And each housewife works alone."[646]

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[643] Spigel, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-75, cit. p. 76.
[644] Morse, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
[645] Beattie, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[646] Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, "The Manufacture of Housework," *Socialist Revolution*, 5:4 (Oct.-Dec. 1975), 6, quoted in: Loader, Jayne "Jeanne Dielman. Death in Installments." *Jump Cut*, no. 16

The film's sources undividedly echo the traditional view of paid work as pertaining to a male sphere and the family as a female sphere. And until the 1960s the convention of referring to unpaid work at home as "not real work" would confound women's knowledge of their hardworking labour tradition.[647] Naomi Wolf claims that for over a century and a half middle-class, educated Western women have been controlled by various ideals about female perfection and this tactic has worked by taking the best of female culture and attaching to it the most repressive demands of male-dominated societies, in the 1950s, these forms of ransom were imposed on the family. "Under the Feminine Mystique, virtually all middle-class women were condemned to a compulsive attitude toward domesticity, whatever their individual inclinations."[648]

Since the material *The Atomic Cafe* is made of dates from 1945 to 1960, it falls short of what has come to be known as Second Wave Feminism, which emerged in the 1960s in the United States. During the decades of 1960 and 1970s the government passed a variety of policies, regulations and laws in an attempt to provide "equal opportunity" for women as well as minorities.[649] The 1970s had been momentous years for American women, marking the turning point from non-paid to paid work.[650] But, in truth, the influx of American women into paid work really began in the late 1950s.[651] However, the image of the perfect housewife on television and in film would prevail. It was also seen as a distinctive American feature, and was defended as a capitalist feature. Ruth Rosen argues that the belief that American superiority rested on its booming consumer culture and rigidly defined gender roles became strangely intertwined with Cold War politics. She recounts how in 1959, at an American National Exhibition in Moscow, Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev engaged in what she calls a "bizarre kitchen debate." They argued over the

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(1977): 10-12 http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC16folder/JeanneDielman.html#1 (Last accessed September 2 2015)

[647] Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth*. London: Vintage, 1991, p. 24.

[648] *Ibid.*, pp. 271-272, cit.p. 272.

[649] Larwood, Laurie and Gutek, Barbara A. "Women at Work in the USA." In *Working Women. An International Survey*, edited by Marilyn J. Davidson and Cary L. Cooper, 237-67. Chichister: John Wiley & Sons, 1984, p. 238.

[650] By the end of the decade 51.2% of women over the age of 16 were working and women by 1984 constituted 42.5% of the US labour force. Larwood and Gutek, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

[651] According to Rosen, "Between 1940 and 1960, the number of working women doubled, rising from 15 percent to 30 percent, and the proportion of married working mothers jumped 400 percent. By 1955, more women worked in the labor force than had during World War II, when women had been mobilized to support America's fighting men". Rosen, Ruth. *The World Split Open*. Tantor eBooks, 2012, (epub) Paragraph: 2.193

relative merits of American and Soviet washing machines, televisions, and electric ranges. Nixon boasted of the laboursaving devices that gave American women time to cultivate their charms as wives and to care for their children, and Khrushchev responded that the Soviet Union had little use for full-time housewives; its women workers were busy building an industrial society.[652] Moreover, housewives in the United States were defended as "managers of destiny perfectly positioned to fight socialism."[653]

However, not all family units composed of mother, father, and children seem to fit in this ideal. The Rosenbergs, who had two children of their own, break the narrative of the family within *The Atomic Cafe*. The film does not get into the issue of their culpability; it only offers excerpts of their public lynching. As Robert Coover did in his novel *The Public Burning*, they are never represented directly, there is no attempt to understand their side of the case; they seem just to fulfil a role of apostates and as characters of a part of popular mythology.[654]

3.3.2.4. Militarization and Continuous Victory

This idea of continuous threat, personified by the Rosenbergs but not limited to them, is a narrative continuation. Mechanisms at work in the 1940s, regarding the discourses on the war, were still in motion during the 1950s, as we have discussed above. But how exactly did this play out? It might be helpful, at this moment, to take a small detour and reference some of Sartre's reasoning behind the idea of danger. He argues that if a group first forms in reaction to an external danger, the group often might find itself facing an internal danger: a "dispersive fear", the sense that the external danger is either too strong or too weak to really be fought against. Although if we try to think of the United States as "a group"- which is quite a stretch – it would be hard to defend that it was formed in reaction to one specific violent event. However, Dana Polan talks of "wartime unity" after the attack on Pearl Harbor, which creates a new collective identity in a certain sense. Sartre believes that after an inaugural violent event, a second narrative move becomes necessary, not the originary violence of an

[652] Rosen, Ruth, *op. cit.,* epub Paragraphs 2.163 and 2.164.
[653] Warren Kinsman, "The Responsibility of Women in Today's World," an address before the Wilmington City Federation of Women's Clubs and Allied Organizations, in *E. I. Du Pont de Nemours Inc., Papers, Hagley Museum and Library*, Wilmington, Delaware. Quoted in Rosen, Ruth, *op. cit.*,epub paragraph 2.165
[654] Pughe, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

external attack, but a subsequent narrative that represents the violence of continued attack. This narrative continuation can occur in several ways. First, it can imply that external danger has not disappeared. The US had come out of the war "victorious," but it perpetuated a sense of triumph in the shape of new battles yet to be fought as victories during the following decades. A second narrative option has to do with what Sartre terms "Terror", that is "in the absence of immediate dangers, a group will create its own representation of dangers (and will even make group loyalty revolve around an internally generated danger)."[655]

We could read both narratives in the imagery of the Cold War era. The vast majority of the moving-images of this time and, in particular, the nuclear test documentaries "show the high-water mark of the militarization of American culture," in the sense that the military and its policies served as template for conducting domestic life.[656] Children, as well as adults – who were being infantilized –, were taught to see Americans as the good guys, fighting wars fairly for noble and progressive causes. They learned in school that they were part of a tradition that had fought against a corrupt monarchy in the Revolution, that had fought to free the slaves in the Civil War, and that had fought against fascism in World War II. This is what Tom Englehardt called the heritage of a triumphalist narrative *victory culture*. He also points out that the story of the "Good War," World War II, and the story of the new Cold War did not fit together seamlessly. The story of victory in World War II was endlessly replayed in movies, comics, and television[657] These fiction films and television shows also influenced the "factual discourse" of educational and propaganda films. This *victory culture* is also prevalent in nuclear test documentaries, which, as Mielke pointed out, held certain similarities to John Wayne films where the "good guys" always win. The influence of fiction rhetoric is also present in films with scientific aspiration, which are sometimes the narrative tone of *film noir*. In fact, this link becomes even clearer when we take into account that *The Atomic Cafe*'s soundtrack includes the themes from criminal and film noir movies such as *Brute Force* (Jules Dassin, 1947) and *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946).[658]

These years are marked with a proliferation of pamphlets, films and other materials created by government agencies, which explained the steps to take in order to

[655] Polan, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61, cit.p. 61.
[656] Mielke, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
[657] Jacobs, Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
[658] Auty, *op. cit.*, p. 289

survive an atomic attack. The message was you could survive if you took the correct actions. But what was really implicit was the opposite "The hyper-vigilance demanded by these survival instructions communicated that nuclear war was not only inevitable – it was imminent."[659] In fact, the wide distribution of films such as *Duck & Cover* to schools all over the United States portray children as "vigilant Cold Warriors."[660] Which reminds us of Dana Polan's declarations concerning the importance of the average person implied that everyone had something, which included children and would install heroism everywhere.[661] A spokesperson for the Atomic Energy Commission went as far as to affirm, "If all the school children in the nation would witness an A-bomb blast, it would do much to destroy the fear and uncertainty which now exists."[662] However, this was not so. Many of those who had been granted access to nuclear test (scientists, journalists any many members of the military) had deep reservations as a result of what they witnessed.

Bo Jacobs elaborates on how this militarization shaped many American children's infancy. The fact that films such as *Duck and Cover* were shown in classrooms in elementary schools "served to give these messages a chilling authoritativeness;"[663] and, at the same time, this critical element of American Cold War society – the fact that educators, government officials and parents felt the necessity, the urgency, of preparing the country's youth for atomic warfare – conveyed the message that their own Cold War government was unreliable.[664] The prospect of war fought with nuclear weapons pervaded American culture even when the United States was the sole possessor of such weapons. The fear and anxiety intensified after 1949, when the Soviet Union acquired its own nuclear weapons and the Cold War began in earnest.[665] Within the war narrative, as represented in cinema, evolved a mythology of the strength of the ordinary person, of the "average American." There was, according to Polan "an increasing investment in Willys and Joes (…) of the war, an image that sings the ostensible quiet virtues of everyday people, people who are special because they are typical."[666] This treasured typicality would continue in the filmic and television representations of idealized American life. Curiously, the emphasis on the importance

[659] Jacobs, Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[660] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[661] Polan, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
[662] Jacobs, Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 25
[663] *Ibid.,* p. *32*.
[664] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[665] *Ibid.*, pp. 25-44, cit. p. 25.
[666] Polan, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

of the average person implied that everyone had something, even children. This would install heroism everywhere.[667] This characteristic remained even after the war came to a conclusion and is clearly exemplified in the educational films issued by governmental agencies, and clearly pointed out by The Archives Project in its re-edition of such material.

3.3.2.5. Looking for Discrepancies

Possibly one of the most interesting indirect statements of *The Atomic Cafe* is the lack of scientific facts behind the images that were being disseminated with educational purposes. The very few scientists, real scientists, that appear in the film are practically the only people to give actual facts, or information of value. The misguidance is shared by both television material and films produced by governmental agencies. Contrary to the image of science and scientist as portrayed in the nuclear test documentaries, many scientists (including many prominent figures involved in the construction of the atomic and hydrogen bombs) were reluctant, and in some cases were outright contrary, to the government's policy of secrecy and misinformation. One notable case was Norbert Wiener, who expressed his open refusal to Cold War ideology, by not accepting any work related to the military after World War II.[668]

Not many people went as far as Wiener, however, a great number of the scientists, who had worked with the department of defence during the war and who continued their work on atomic and hydrogen bombs afterwards, defended openness and international controls. Few weeks following Hiroshima the scientists who helped build the bomb, and knew more about its destructive power than anyone, were not allowed to express a public opinion. The scientists had conflicting emotions, what they felt was not guilt, since most believed the end of war justified the Hiroshima (if not Nagasaki) bombing, but rather their qualms were about the further development of the weapon. Robert Oppenheimer informed Washington that, as a group, they did not wish to be asked to work on the bomb "against the dictates of their hearts." Many scientists

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[667] *Ibid.* p. 69.

[668] Heims, Steve J. "Introduction." In *The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society*, edited by Norbert Wiener, xi-xxiii. London: Free Association Books, 1989, p. xii. (Initially published in1950, *The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society*, had the underlying theme of the interrelation between science and society via technology).

searched for a way to prevent a nuclear arms race, they formed organizations at each of the Manhattan Project Sites and drafted memos. These texts were authored by many hands with contrasting opinions, but all the statements had three common themes: it was futile to keep the bomb secret, it was impossible to develop a defence against it, and an arms race was inevitable without international controls.[669] What is more, Robert Oppenheimer had submitted a policy document to the War Department summarizing the sentiment emerging from the laboratories and explained that the scientists would "be most happy" if their views were brought to the attention of the American public.[670] However, the Atomic Energy Commission went in an absolutely different direction, it decided that any information was to remain a secret and there would be severe penalties for violations. The scientists formed a national organization, the Federation of Atomic Scientists, and printed a slim paperback entitled *One World or None*, which included writings by Einstein, Oppenheimer, Morison Szilard and others, expressing their ideas and forming a countermovement.[671] The scientists' discrepancies were not common knowledge; they were absolutely absent in the governmental moving-image productions regarding nuclear weapons. One of *The Atomic Cafe*'s merits is, while eloquently showing the predominant imagery of the atom bomb and all related issues, it hints to small cracks, subtle discrepancies among the scientific and military community, such as Tibbets mention of a possible guilt complex.

The way in which most people learned about science outside classrooms and textbooks was through mass communications media, which became increasingly shaped by entertainment values,[672] as well as corporate interests.[673] During a brief period after World War II, radio played an important role in facilitating public debate on atomic energy. Postwar coverage of atomic energy began in celebration and curiosity, but it did not take long before the acrimonious political debate over military versus civil control of the atom, and the chilling implications of increased scientific secrecy would change the scene.[674] Science journalists and popularizers were entering a decade in which their assumptions about the openness of science and the flow of knowledge to the public, as well as its internationalism, would be tested in the political arena.[675]

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[669] Lifton and Mitchell, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.
[670] *Ibid.*, p. 68.
[671] *Ibid.*, p. 73
[672] LaFollete, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[673] Herbert Schiller, *op. cit.*; and Mander, *op. cit.*
[674] LaFollete, *op. cit.*, p. 180.
[675] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Television would have a crucial effect on the shape science would take in popular imagery. For Mander, this is the very nature of the medium because, he argues, the technology of television predetermines the boundaries of its content, some information can be conveyed completely, some partially and some not at all. For him, television is a bias which contains all the other biases, offering pre-selected material that excludes whatever is not selected.[676] One key aspect in television's portrayal of science is that it stimulated the development of new types of science popularizers, people who were not scientists but were professional and relaxed on camera, "hosts who projected a well-mannered image of pleasant amateurism, almost as if too much sophistication might render the science suspect."[677] A shift that helped to loosen further the scientific community's control of its own public image. The most successful of these early shows featured uncritical perspectives on science.[678] Not only that, but television was also sending a message of who could, or should, be a scientist, women were noticeably absent or marginalized. Women were more likely to appear as models conducting demonstrations than as guest scientists.[679]

However, not only was the content of popular science on radio and television changing, science was loosing its prominence as a way to understand the world, it became just one of many ways. Religion was used constantly to provide an alternative source of answers.[680] Appeals to religious authority demonstrated a change in the acceptable parameters of popular science, "the new mediated face of science attempted to resonate with the audience's revised ideas of science's negative and positive potential and with the reality of science's new politicized role in American culture."[681] Attention to social and moral aspects had become compulsory elements of popular science content, and it was done through a Christian prism.

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[676] Mander, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-264.
[677] LaFollete, *op. cit.*, p. 212.
[678] *Ibid.*, p.215. LaFollette speaks of "Disneyfication," since in 1954 Walt Disney created a series to promote his new theme park *Disneyland*, which would transform the context for science popularization for decades. During the first 21st seasons a fifth of the program dealt with science, nature and space; those themes were included in one of two recurrent segments, "Adventureland" and "Tomorrowland." The latter included the project "Our Friend the Atom," which intended to demonstrate the "limitless peaceful uses of atomic energy." LaFollete, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-9.
[679] One clear example: *The Johns Hopkins Science Review* from 1948 to 1960: 2% of guests were women scientists or physicians, and although women would occasionally be part of a group, only 2 women were ever a program's featured guests. LaFollete, *op. cit*, pp. 221-222.
[680] *Ibid.*, pp. 232-33.
[681] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

According to Mielke many of the nuclear test documentaries, - and, we could add, the educational films - there is a link between the bomb and the values of church and state.[682] However, the Church's (at least that of members of the Catholic and Protestant Churches in the United States) position was not as simple, only its portrayal flattened the discrepancies expressed by religious figures. According to Lifton and Mitchell, from the start, ethical expressions about Hiroshima came mainly from church leaders and church publications, but no high-level religious body officially condemned the atomic attacks. On March 5, 1946, the Federal Council of Churches released a powerful report, signed by twenty-two prominent Protestant religious leaders, unsparing in its criticism of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.[683] The Council's action seemed to motivate other church leaders who had been silent on the subject, among them was Fulton J. Sheen, a Catholic monsignor, who declared "the attack on Hiroshima was contrary to moral law."[684]

Lifton and Mitchell mention another assault on the official narrative, one that came as quite a surprise, since it came from a commission supervised by the military. As ordered by president Truman, an impartial group of investigators were sent to Japan, led by vice chairman Paul Nitze for a survey, which concluded that American bombing had failed to win the war. Rather it was a combination of factors; at best, according to the report, the atomic attacks combined to expedite the peace, since the emperor and his top ministers had decided in May of 1945 that the war should end. However, the report only briefly attracted media attention. And another report from 1946 for the War Department, went even further by declaring that Japanese leaders were looking for a "pretext" to surrender and the Soviet declaration of war on Japan would have almost certainly provided it. Not surprisingly this report was not made public until 1989.[685]

3.3.2.6. Nuclearosis

Possibly one of the most striking terms of the entire film is "nuclearosis," taken form a training film, it refers to a diagnostic made by a doctor that uses it to name the

[682] Mielke, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
[683] Lifton and Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[684] *Ibid.*, p. 81.
[685] *Ibid.*, pp. 82-3.

symptoms of an "undue worry about nuclear war."[686] After we have seen how the power of the atomic bomb has been publicized, and how the public has been alerted of the "Red threat" and the immediate danger the bomb poses in hands of the Soviet Union, we are confronted with this notion, "nuclearosis." As if the fear the possible atomic war, which was in large part thanks to the films produced by governmental agencies, was something laughable. We are told in the most condescending of tones that one should not worry too much; that the excess of worry over nuclear war is a derangement, a disease, and, ironically, we are told that it responds to the enemy's desires and manipulations.

Anxiety towards the effects of radiation were present practically from the get go. Lifton and Mitchell also mention a "fear psychosis" in reference to the fact that Americans remained deeply worried about the atomic bomb after Hiroshima.[687] Medical experts and others began to worry about a new phenomenon that they would refer to as an "unreasoning fear" of radiation. This fear, initially, could have started with some of the initiatives of the scientists of the Manhattan Project who, as soon as the war was over, which meant to instruct the world in the dangers of nuclear power and argued for a full exchange of information and an international policy to hold the proliferation of nuclear armament at bay.[688] However, control of nuclear energy was turning out in practice to mean control over secrets, in the name of "security."[689] Already in planning the first bomb tests, scientists had worried about the dust that the explosion would hurl into the air, which would become radioactive, drift and eventually "fall out" on the desert. But the AEC was determined to let nothing impede its tests. It opted for a policy of reassurance. It developed a public relations campaign to insist that there was no chance of harm in Nevada and the press repeated these reassurances.[690] As a result, in the 1950s the concerns regarding the effects of radiation if mentioned in propaganda films were ridiculed. All worries regarding radiation in the film are shaken off with outright false information, which was intended to reassure American citizens. A clear example of this can be found in the sequence corresponding to the Troop Test Smoky, where we see how the soldiers are told that the blast poses three dangers: the blast itself, the heat and radiation, which is deemed "the least important" of the three. To reassure

[686] Canby, *op. cit.*
[687] Lifton and Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
[688] Weart, Spencer R. *Nuclear Fear. A History of Images*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 111.
[689] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[690] *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

the soldiers of how unimportant the threat of radiation is, the Briefing Officer says "if you receive enough gamma radiation to cause sterility or severe sickness, you'll be killed by blast, flying debris or heat *anyway*". Another instructional film included in *The Atomic Cafe* explains that the dust and debris resulting from an atomic explosion are only hazardous if introduced to the body via mouth or ruptures in the skin. This explanation is followed by a soldier recounting to the camera how they got a "mouthful" of dust.

Another clear dismissal is the scene that takes place in Saint George in Utah, where the radio announces that due to the wind there might be a "mild danger of radiation," people are recommended to stay inside for an hour, but to not be alarmed since there is no real peril. But what is bewildering is how the threat posed by atomic bombs is equated to ordinary day to day risks, such as those that fireman encounter in their jobs, or housewives when they cook, or any regular person by just slipping in the shower. This attitude towards radiation and the threats of atomic weaponry in hindsight is both hilarious and unsettling. Now we know differently, but even now we are far from seeing the end results, even today (the radioactive half-life of plutonium is 24000 years), "So even though the violence of bomb testing seems condensed into a few frames of a mushroom cloud, it is a violence that lingers and kills in the present day and far beyond."[691]

The entire attitude of false reassurance is chilling when one thinks of the real devastating effects of the bomb. Regular American citizens did not fully know what the atomic bomb did to the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, according to Lifton and Mitchell this was partly due to psychological resistance, but mainly it was the result of secrecy, distortion, and suppression that would persist, and have profound effects, for decades.[692] One of the aspects of the bomb considered as too sensitive to be shared were the real effects of radiation, it "symbolized the special horror of the new weapon and introduced an element of moral ambiguity. It seemed comparable to the effects of poison gas, which warring nations had stockpiled but generally refused to use."[693]

[691] Mielke, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[692] Lifton and Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
[693] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

In 1946 *The New Yorker* magazine dedicated an issue to Hiroshima by a young journalist named John Hersey, which would later become a bestselling book.[694] When it came to linking nuclear energy with death, the most disturbing news concerned radiation injuries. The governmental agencies in general, and General Groves in particular, dismissed all this as Japanese propaganda and American officials harassed scientists and reporters who exclaimed about radiation from the Hiroshima bombing. They insisted in pointing out that most of the casualties resulted from the blast and fire and not radiation.[695]

Less than a decade after the bombings of the Japanese cities, another tragedy took place. On March 1st of 1954 the crew of a Japanese fishing ship, *Fukuryu Maru* (Lucky Dragon), inadvertently sailed into the range of the "Bravo" hydrogen bomb test site at Bikini Atoll, which was about 85 miles away. For hours after the test, white ash fell onto the decks of the ship and the crewmembers collected bags of it as souvenirs. Before nightfall that day, everyone on board grew sick. The incident triggered a crisis in relations between the United States and Japan, in part because of Washington's attempts to maintain secrecy over its nuclear tests and the governments' position that assured the American public that the fishing boat was at fault for sailing outside the designated safe area. The incident would come to be known as "The Second Bombing of Mankind" by the Japanese press.[696] This incident is featured in *The Atomic Cafe*, where we in fact hear how the government blames the fishermen for their fate. The newsreels that covered the event also reported on the contamination of the fish captured by the crew and how by the time they had been properly diagnosed, the fish had already been sold into markets all over Japan. According to the American press, as is seen in *The Atomic Cafe,* "A panic ensued. Midnight burials of recent catches in the vicinity of the H-bomb explosion took place all over Japan. The bottom had dropped out of the fish market, and the Japanese people *chose* to do without the staple food for a long time after the tragic affair."[697]

The devastating effects of hydrogen bomb fall out had been treated as a military secret. However, citizens who followed the news carefully could begin to understand that these bombs brought with them radiation hazards. The Eisenhower administration,

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[694] Hersey, John "Hiroshima." *The New Yorker*, August 31, 1946. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1946/08/31/hiroshima (Last accessed September 12 2015).
[695] Spencer R. Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, pp. 107-109.
[696] Roberto, John Rocco. "Japan, Godzilla and the Atomic Bomb." *History Vortex website*. http://www.historyvortex.org/JapanGodzillaAtomicBomb.html (Last accessed September 10 2013).
[697] Rafferty, Loader and Rafferty. *THE ATOMIC CAFE: The Book of the Film*, p. 62.

convinced that national security depended on bomb tests, dismissed complaints about radiation perils as Communist propaganda. AEC officials continued to issue a barrage of reassurances and the American press in the 1950s general went along.[698] However, fear persisted and when it made itself present in films, it was usually in science fiction films, "Hollywood turned to the emerging film genre of science fiction to subtly capitalize upon the audience's concern with questions that were suppressed in official channels." And by the 1950s the most prevalent forms of science fiction films with atomic elements were stories about radiation-produced monsters.[699] This was one the one channel where the anxieties provoked by the fear of radiation could find an outlet, and it did so beyond Hollywood as well. Interestingly, the Japanese film *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, Ishiro Honda, 1954) was the reflection of the fears of atomic weapons; the inspiration for the radiation-mutated monster was a result of the Fukuryu Maru incident.[700] American filmmakers became cautious of ideological scrutiny over atomic issues, audiences became weary of cold war diatribes, and atomic discourse gradually became veiled under the development of this new genre. Subtle criticism found expression in the creative freedom of the science fiction genre, through which it became possible to speculate about the dangers and the possible devastating results of atomic development. Hence, these giant mutated creatures served as vehicles for all kinds of unforeseen consequences of atomic weapons.[701]

3.3.3. ELLIPSIS

There is an evident and striking time gap in the film, we are missing two decades, and this links even more intensely the 1950s with the 1980s. During the so-called "Second Cold War" of the early 1980s the American president's discourse would once again appear monolithic and Manichean. Within it we find a new recourse to religion and the idea of protection via an unhindered escalation of weaponry. The film takes a big step backwards and there is a conscious omission of what had happened in between the years 1960 and 1982, leaving out Eisenhower's warning, in 1961, of a "military-

[698] Weart, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.
[699] Evans, Joyce. *Celluloid Mushroom Clouds. Hollywood and the Atomic Bomb*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998, p. 75.
[700] Roberto, *op. cit.*
[701] Evans, *op. cit*., p. 8.

industrial complex" profiteering from the Cold War arms race.[702] The film focuses on the early Cold War era, making the parallels even more intense. Which brings to mind Fustel de Coulanges' recommendation, mentioned by Benjamin, to historians who wish to "relive" an era to blot out everything they know about the later course of history. A method that, according to Benjamin, historical materialists have broken with, for it implies a process of empathy with the victor, which benefits the rulers and whose origin is in the indolence of the heart.[703] *The Atomic Cafe*, if seen in this light, in reliving an era by blotting out the later course of history, must be understood as either an ironic or a satirical exercise, something that will be dealt with in detail further in the chapter.

The images included in *The Atomic Cafe* in the 1980s seemed outrageous, unbelievable; so many changes had taken place, so many historical events that had had their covering in the media. All the events of the 1960s and 1970s have been omitted: JFK's assassination, the missile crisis, Vietnam, the civil rights movements and all the turmoil of those decades, which also saw the maturation of television and the development of light portable camera equipment. The United States had seen the biggest baby boom in its history from 1946 to 1964, which at its peak in 1957 held the record of over four million births.[704] Many of these children, who had been taught from childhood that they had the power and responsibility to save themselves and those around them, came of age politically in the 1960s and 1970s. And, unlike their parents, "As young adults they refused to live in the basement of fear and fatalism toward nuclear war."[705] But by the 1980s the social and political panorama had changed and it seemed that many cultural manifestations were expressing certain nostalgia for "happier, simpler times", and American popular culture has consistently portrayed the 1950s as the "simple decade."[706]

3.3.3.1. Nostalgia

As the 1980s arrived, the end of nuclear arms race was nowhere in sight. Jimmy Carter would leave the White House in 1981 with none of his initial nuclear arms

[702] Quoted in Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 201.
[703] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," p. 256.
[704] Rosen, Ruth, *op. cit.*, epub paragraph 2.171.
[705] Jacobs, Bo, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
[706] Strada, Michael J. "Kaleidoscopic Nuclear Images of the Fifties." *Journal of Popular Culture* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1986 1986): 179-98, p. 179.

reduction goals achieved.[707] What is more, "the dawn of the 1980s would bring to the White House a president who not only thought a nuclear Armageddon was prophesized in the Bible but whose policies during his first term almost made a nuclear Armageddon inevitable. That president was Ronald Reagan."[708]

Reagan came into presidency after a sweeping victory in November 1980. Famous as a prominent anti-communist crusader on and off camera for decades, he had played a leading part in enforcing the Hollywood blacklist. His experience in film and television gave him an acute appreciation of popular culture, more than any previous American president, which could have lead the way for him to "rewrite the past to suit his upbeat vision of America's present and future." He presented himself as a "small-town, innocent American," who could restore common decency to a corrupt government, with his "dreamy black-and-white rhetoric," appealing to an ideological faction whose views had not been substantially represented in Washington since the 1950s.[709] Reagan had a very powerful weapon on his side: charisma, "that indefinable something that makes the star image special."[710]

Reagan's administration undertook the largest military build up in peacetime history.[711] But with a novelty, Reagan had come in "on a platform of restoring the dreams of abundance without any necessity for sacrifice on the part of the population."[712] Besides echoing the spirit of abundance portrayed in 1950s advertising, he promised tax cuts and reduction of inflation against a backdrop of failing productivity and flawed social services, exhibiting an attitude of taking for granted limitless resources,[713] which lead MIT economist Lester Thurow to ironically describe as the genius of having "designed an economy where it is possible to consume without saving."[714]

To many conservative Protestants and Catholics in the United States, Americans were the chosen people, they were those who believed in "the holy trinity of God,

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[707] Powaski, Ronald E. *Return to Armageddon. The United States and the Nuclear Arms Race*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 9.
[708] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[709] Shaw, *op. cit.,* pp. 267-268.
[710] Cook, Pam. *Screening the Past. Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 93-94.
[711] Powaski, *op. cit.*, p. 15. According to Tony Shaw, by the 1980s the US government's propaganda machine employed more than ten thousand full time staff and spent over $ 2 billion a year. Shaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.
[712] Riesman, David. "The Dream of Abundance Reconsidered." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 1981 1981): 285-302, p. 292.
[713] *Ibid.*, pp. 287-288.
[714] Quoted in Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

Democracy and Freedom," they way of life was a model and was threatened by what Ronald Reagan called "the 'evil empire' of the Soviet Union."[715] The government's profligacy was combined with what Riesman called "the belligerencies of the 'better dead than Red' sort," and was being popularized by American mass media and being widespread beyond the United States.[716] In fact, some speak of a "Second Cold War" in the 1980s.[717] However, cinema was not as easily controlled as in previous decades; American independent filmmakers had come of age in the 1970s, thanks in part to the invention of cheap filmmaking technologies and in part to "the maturation of a generation of babyboomers creating an audience for alternative films."[718] On the other hand, Hollywood films were submitted to less political scrutiny, instead propaganda officials often played more attention to television, the prime medium of communication and attitude formation at that time.[719] In general, American mass media supported its government's anti-communist stance in the 1980s, as it had done in the 1950s, mainly because their owners and employers shared Washington's ideological worldview. It is important to point out that cold war propaganda in mass media, was not simply the expression of official ideology, it involved a *range of different ideologies*, discourses and institutions.[720] During the 1980s, "Ronald Reagan gave many the strong impression he viewed the Cold War through a camera lens, but he was surely not the only senior American politician who instinctively fused cinematic images of past and present conflicts with real life."[721]

The Nostalgia Film

Given *The Atomic Cafe*'s use of historical images, it might be helpful to contrast it with what some postmodern theorists have called the "nostalgia film." One of the most referenced authors on this topic is Fredric Jameson, who speaks of nostalgia as a postmodern phenomenon when addressing architecture and cinema in the 1980s. He speaks of the nostalgia film as one of many manifestations of "pastiche," a practice that he sees proliferating both in high art and in mass culture, and cites *American Graffiti*

[715] Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
[716] Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 292.
[717] Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 225
[718] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
[719] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
[720] *Ibid.*, p. 302.
[721] *Ibid.*, pp. 303-304.

(Steven Spielberg, 1973) as the inaugural nostalgia film. The common characteristic of nostalgia films is that they recreate the fashion, the ambiance, or the plotlines of movies from the past. In the nostalgia film he sees an inability to focus on the present, he argues it is a symptom of an incapability of achieving aesthetic representations of current experience and states that, if that is so, it is an indictment of consumer capitalism itself or, at least, a "symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history."[722] What is more, he writes, "we seem *condemned* to seek the historic past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach."[723] Jameson's account leaves out the potentialities of dealing with time and history through images. The films he analyses might be compliant and underwhelming as aesthetical representations of the present, however, it is not an inevitable condition but an option within mainstream culture. Moreover, pop images and stereotypes about the past can be quite eloquent both concerning the present, which chooses to look into a certain period, and the past, as it is perceived further in time. What seems to trouble Jameson is a sense of surface and loss of meaning in contemporary works.

Vera Dika takes into account Jameson's thoughts on nostalgia films and pastiche; however, she perceives it as a "return to the image," which to her makes sense as a logical step after the "structural" period of the 1960s. She states that for Jameson, nostalgia in postmodern film is not so much a re-presentation of a particular historical period as it is a recreation of its *cultural artifacts*, and to this she contrasts Noel Carroll's idea of "allusionism." Carroll does not see this recycling of elements as a result of a postmodern cultural condition, but as a result of a rise of "film literacy" among an educated group of moviegoers and moviemakers.[724] For Dika, this idea of film literacy is of great importance for the nostalgia film, since it turns "past images and genres" into "examples of worked-over cinematic languages," that might "be seen as sign systems capable of being reconstructed in oppositional ways to speak critically new texts."[725] I find it necessary to point out that Dika is writing about "nostalgia films," fiction films that recreate some element of the past, however, this idea of "sign system" that can be "reconstructed" to "speak critically new texts" is even more rich, and more

[722] Jameson, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10, cit. 10.
[723] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[724] Dika, Vera. *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film. The Uses of Nostalgia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 14.
[725] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

problematic, when dealing with found footage films. What found footage films add is a tension between the moving image as representation and the moving image as record. This idea of film as record has already been dealt with in Chapter 1, but what happens when, unlike Shub, filmmakers have lost faith in the mechanically produced record as an objective image?

Jameson's view of the nostalgia film is an eminently negative one and seems to leave little, if any, room for the reflexive and essayistic qualities of cinema. He argues "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak though the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum. But this means that contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way; even more, it means that one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past."[726] First, I would like to address the notion of the "imaginary museum," which we owe to André Malraux, who used it to reflect on how art had become an intellectual exercise, first, in museums and, then, even more so with the development of mechanically reproduced images.[727] Recorded moving images create an overflowing archive that threatens to flatten differences and complexities, but at the same time it leaves those images within reach, ready to be worked on, and it is precisely this accessibility which allows dialogue, critique, contestation.

As for Jameson's statement that art was going to be about itself, this is not necessarily a negative outcome. Where he sees failure, some could see a struggle against loss of depth. Contemporary art is in great measure self-reflective, so is cinema. But, when have images *not been about images*? And when have images been *only about images*? As for his description of these phenomena as "failure and imprisonment," the imprisonment would be to not enter into the reflective potentialities of this self-referentiality. It might be helpful to recur to Deleuze, who reminds us that cinema is one type of image. What is particular to cinema is that it "has always been trying to construct an image of thought, of the mechanisms of thought."[728] And, in relation to this

[726] Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[727] Malraux, André. *Museum without Walls*. London: Secker &Warburg, 1967.
[728] Deleuze, Gilles. "Doubts About the Imaginary." In *Negotiations 1972-1990*, 62-67. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 64-65.

notion of cinema as an image of thought, I concur with Godard, in the sense that I too believe that cinema holds the potential to think itself, and to think through itself.[729]
"Images, in cinema, are signs. Signs are images seen from the viewpoint of their composition and generation. (…) Cinema has given rise to its own particular signs, whose classification is specific to cinema, but once it produces them they turn up elsewhere, and the world starts 'turning cinematic'."[730]

The Atomic Cafe as an Anti-Nostalgic Endeavour

The Atomic Cafe refers to the past but in a very different manner than the nostalgia film; it is a *re-presentation* of past images, not a re-creation but a literal act of presenting once again images of the past, images shot and distributed in the past. They are the same images but, at the same time, they are completely different because they are in a different flow, because they are shown to different spectators. There is an act of framing (or re-framing), and this framing changes everything. We see *the* images of a specific period in a way they were never shown, in a way that was impossible to see them in their time. In a similar way that one sees frescos from a church in a national museum, out of context and juxtaposed with oil paintings on wood and canvas, sculptures, tapestries, etc. But with the difference that when one enters a museum one in entering a specifically delimited space that offers a specific cultural and civic ritual,[731] whereas moving images are practically ubiquitous, now more than ever.

The act of recycling moving images turns those sequences into archival images. Those archival images might always bear the sign of history, but some found footage films go further to *interrogate* the allegory of historiography that archival practices mobilize. Works that experiment with the documentary status of the archival images evoke alternative and dialectical forms of temporality and history.[732] In Russell's words, "Recycling found images implies a profound sense of the already-seen, the already-happened, creating a spectator position that is necessarily historical."[733]

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[729] Jean-Luc Godard has defended this idea in many texts and conferences, but where he expresses it better than anywhere else is in his film series *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1988-1998), an excellent found footage film and essay on the moving image.
[730] Deleuze, "Doubts about the imaginary," p. 65.
[731] Duncan, Carol. *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.
[732] Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-241.
[733] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 241

The directors are working with archival images, but they are producing a condensation that replicates an overabundance that is of their own time, the flow of multi-channel television, the act of tuning in and tuning out via remote control. It may be a film, but it feels a lot like television. They offer a particular "point of entry," an exploration of fragments. And according to Baron, it is the fragment, the metonym, in documentary films that explore archival images that hold the potential for epiphany, or at least a certain kind of revelation within the "disorienting contemporary situation." For her, the key historical trope is not metaphor but metonymy. She argues, following Runia, that metaphor is concerned with "transfer of meaning" and metonymy, on the other hand, is concerned with the "transfer of presence," which she equates to a "transfer of experience and affect."[734] This begs the question, is the *transfer of experience* possible? There is a transfer of presence, which offers an experience, even a rethinking or an approximation to what a prior experience might have entailed, but is experience itself transferable? In any case, this transfer of presence is a strategy of navigation among the excess of audiovisual material. Baron sees the fragment as an occasion to obliquely address these larger questions of how we can deal with textual production that has already gone far beyond any individual's (…) control."[735]

This is not to say that the notion of nostalgia does not play a role within *The Atomic Cafe*. It does but in a different way than it does in the "nostalgia film." Pam Cook argues, "the more self-reflective nostalgic films can employ cinematic strategies to actively comment on issues of memory, history and identity,"[736] *The Atomic Cafe*, does deal with issues of history and memory, but it should not be contemplated as a "nostalgia film" nor as a nostalgic film, since it lacks one essential characteristic of nostalgia: there is no longing in it. The term nostalgia was coined in the 17th century recurring to *nostos*, meaning "to return home," and *algos*, meaning "pain" or "longing."[737] Nostalgia initially had to do with dislocation, it was a spatial notion, but with time it became a historical emotion, as result of a new understanding of time and space.

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[734] Baron, "Contemporary Documentary Film", p. 23.
[735] Baron, "Contemporary Documentary Film", p. 24.
[736] Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[737] Coined by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss doctor, in 1688, who used it as a student in one of his dissertations to define a kind of severe homesickness of suffered by soldiers deployed far away from home. Hutcheon, Linda. "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern." *UTEL website* (1998). http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html.;" and Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2002, epub paragraph 12.1.

In fact, the film could be described as *anti-nostalgic*, in the sense that *The Atomic Cafe* deals specifically with what is *retrievable*, that is, recorded images and sounds. They demonstrate that what others might long for was just an image, and that that image, both then and now, only existed as such. By doing this, they are not speaking of the past (or, at least, not only), but of certain uses images are put to (namely propagandistic uses) and the relation these uses held – and still hold - with policy making, publicity targets and economic aims, as well as social constructions. The film is an anti-nostalgic exercise in the sense that it takes the Second World War victory and the following years off the pedestal that the official narratives, replicated in the mass media, had placed it on. By doing so, the directors critically reflect on current nostalgic discourses that appeal to that longing for something that never really was as it is pined for decades later. They ask the question "Do you really want to go there?" Not only is it impossible to go back to a "simpler time" that never really was, they show how undesirable such an aspiration might be. At the same time, they point out that, in certain respects, things have not changed that much. Film, television, and radio still show Manichean images of family bliss and patriotism that have to do more with the selling of a product and conformism than with community building and social needs, they suggest that the government and the many platforms it employs to disseminate its messages are just as misleading. The very promise of nostalgia, the promise to "rebuild the ideal home," lies at the core of many powerful ideologies "tempting us to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding."[738]

At this point it might be interesting to introduce Svetlana Boym's distinction between two types of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia, which does not think of itself as nostalgia, but as truth and tradition; and reflective nostalgia, which dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging.[739] She argues that restorative nostalgia has two main narrative plots: the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory, based on a Manichean battle of good and evil.[740]

For restorative nostalgia, the past is a *value* in the present, "the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot. Moreover, the past is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay."[741] Which is precisely one of the reasons that *The Atomic Cafe* is so effective: the passage of time is obvious. The images might not have suffered decay, but the

[738] Boym, *op. cit.*, epub paragraph 8.12.
[739] *Ibid.*, epub paragraph 8.21.
[740] *Ibid.*, epub paragraph 18.7.
[741] *Ibid.*, epub pragraph 20.1.

distance is evident. This is also what separates it from the nostalgia film, it is not a flawless modern recreation, it uses *the* images of the time alluded, images that have *aged visibly*. In the decades that separate the time of release of *The Atomic Cafe* and the time that the source material was shot, moving images had evolved in many, many ways, and so had the expectations the public held towards them. More than the cars, the clothes, the houses, maybe even more than the social stereotypes, it is *the moving images themselves that seem so very old.* The only "contemporary" element one encounters is the editing, the splicing, the replication of channel changing, which emphasises the redundancy and the incongruence of the propagandistic material.

Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, is more concerned with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. It focuses "not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time."[742] However, *The Atomic Cafe* in its meditation of history is not nostalgic; it is a reflection on representation, on propaganda, on media. The material is used as archaeological remains to comment on what is still very present by showing it was happening in the past.

The Atomic Cafe offers a visual experience to the viewers: not of what it was like to live in the 1950s, nor what it was like to be a spectator in the 1950s, but an intensified experience of spectatorship in their time, an experience of spectatorship of history via images, and not just any history: history of moving images, history of propaganda. All this happening in a specific time (the early 1980s) where it is not uncommon to address a certain period form the past (the 1950s) nostalgically, portraying it as a golden age, an innocent and simple time. By focusing on those images, most of them idealized with a very few images that offer a contrast, the effect is one of reversal: that ideal is not so ideal after all. It is not that far away either, the overabundance and redundancy of commercial and propagandistic images, as well as their distribution mechanisms are still very alive, very present indeed. They are arguing that what some people are longing for, or what is suggested as desirable, does not and did not exist. This is to be taken seriously even if it is done with a sense of humour. For when you look at many of the images, you cannot help but laugh.

[742] *Ibd.*, epub paragraph 20.1.

3.3.3.2. Humour: Irony and Satire

> "Thanks to the ludicrous footage provided by the 'wacky' atom films of the fifties *The Atomic Cafe* is very funny, in the 'Is this for real?' genre of subversive humor. Its satiric content is practically built-in." Glenn Erickson[743]

It would not be farfetched to assume that *The Atomic Cafe* is more of an ironic or satirical exercise than a nostalgic expression. If we consider it an ironical work, it might be necessary to point out that nostalgia and irony are not always so opposed as one might think. Linda Hutcheon, who has written extensively on irony, analyses both as key components of contemporary culture, even if "an often sentimentalized nostalgia is the very opposite of edgy irony."[744] According to her, nostalgia's power comes, in part, from its structural doubling-up of two different times, an inadequate present and an idealized past. Irony too is doubled, in the sense that it implies two meanings, the "said" and the "unsaid" that rub together to create irony, and "it too packs a considerable punch."[745] She concludes that what irony and nostalgia share is an "unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency – or emotion and politics," and the reason behind that is a "secret hermeneutic affinity." To say something is ironic is less a *description* of the entity itself, than an *attribution* of a quality of *response*. This element of response, this active participation is shared by both irony and nostalgia. Irony is not *in* an object, you either get it or you do not, it happens for you. Nostalgia is not about what you "perceive" in an object, it is what you "feel" when two different temporal moments come together for you. Although she specifies that within the postmodern "nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited *and* ironized," that there is an ironizing of nostalgia itself.

Irony can challenge the conventional and merely rhetorical use of concepts, allowing our conventions and assumptions to be questioned and valued. It can hold the potential for political discussion and contestation.[746] According to Colebrook, only irony can, at one and the same time, judge something and display its own complicity in that something.[747] "The thought of irony allows us to question not just the content of

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[743] Erickson, *op. cit.*
[744] Hutcheon, *op. cit.*
[745] *Ibid.*
[746] Colebrook, Claire. *Irony*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 27.
[747] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

what is said, but whether the subject who speaks is *really* saying what is said."[748] However, it might be best to approach irony with certain prudence. For Deleuze, irony is a tendency in thinking, a tendency to not rest with the world in all its flux of differences, a tendency to posit some ultimate point of view beyond difference. The problem with irony, from Deleuze's point of view, is its elimination of all difference. For him, irony represents both a tendency and a problem of capitalism. According to him, irony has always posited some point above and beyond any particular context or value. In this sense it anticipates the tendency of capitalism to cross contexts and produce a universal point from which all values can be exchanged. When Deleuze criticises irony he criticises this tendency to create a point of judgement that values and orders life, a point of view from which life is systematised and reduced to identity.[749]

Linda Hutcheon also acknowledged the problem and risk of irony, but can come to no conclusion, pointing out how it is far too easy to forget the dangers in the face of the valorisation of irony's subversive potential. And the particular intersection—in the communicative space set up by meaning and affect—that makes irony happen is a highly unstable one.[750] And Colebrook not only relates irony to capitalism, but to postmodernism, stating that one way to understand postmodernity is to see it as a radical rejection or redefinition of irony. If irony demands some idea or point of view above language, contexts or received voices, postmodernity acknowledges that all we have are competing contexts and that any implied 'other' position would itself be a context. From this perspective, postmodernity would be a society of simulation and immanence with no privileged point from which competing voices could be judged. One could be ironic, not by breaking with contexts but in recognising any voice as an effect of context. Alternatively, one could see postmodernity as the impossibility of overcoming irony. Neither position is possible, and yet both seem inevitable. Postmodern irony in its radical form works with this contradiction.[751]

In relation to this danger posed by irony, Deleuze speaks of humour, and of satire, as an opposed tendency. He argues that humour and satire focus on the bodies, particularities, noises and disruptions that are in excess of the system and law of speech.[752] According to Deleuze, humour descends. Both irony and ideas have

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[748] *Ibid.,* p. 123
[749] *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148
[750] *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.
[751] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
[752] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

traditionally been explained through metaphors of height. He understands irony as the adoption of a point of view 'above' a context, and insists that we need to consider just how this distinction between high and low has enabled us to think. Radical humour, or what he calls 'superior irony', dissolves high-low distinctions in order to think of the play of surface.[753] I find this categorization problematic. I can see the logic of explaining irony as a viewpoint from above, in the sense that it can work through what we could call "condescending" mechanisms, such as feigned ignorance; also in the sense that you either get irony or you do not, which is automatically divisory. However to the idea that irony as reductionist and satire as open to particularities is not unproblematic.

It might be helpful to establish a few differences, as well as similarities, between irony and satire. In first place, irony tends to work with ambiguity, whereas satire must be clear to make its point; however, satire might make irony its instrument.[754] Irony can describe an attitude or a characteristic, satire cannot, it is a way of expressing *censure*. Irony is, or can be, subtle, it questions rather than prescribes, and satire is an attack, it expresses rejection and assumes that right and wrong can be defined. They are related in several ways, but essentially they are linked in the sense that they both work through *the interaction of what is said, who says it, and how those addressed react to it*.[755] In other words, both are sophisticated categories of humour, both are demanding of the readers/spectators for their wit to be appreciated, they require certain literacy, certain background knowledge. Both make reference to much more than what is included in the text that is recurring to them.

In *The Atomic Cafe* we find high levels of trickery that we consent to, at least those of us who enjoy the film consent to, we are well aware of the "infractions," the mixing of genres, of mediums, even the inclusion of a sequence from a fiction film. We are shown much more than the average American viewer would have seen in the 1950s. Satire here is also meta-referential, it alludes to the process of editing and montage, to television and publicity, to training and educational films, but it also speaks volumes on the accumulated material that informs our knowledge of events. *The Atomic Cafe* has more to do with TV culture and 1980s politics than it does with 1950s knowledge of atomic weaponry.

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[753] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[754] Pavlovski-Petit, Zoja. "Irony and Satire." In *A Companion to Satire: Ancient to Modern, Blackwell Publishing*, edited by Ruben Quintero, 510-24. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, pp. 517-518.
[755] *Ibid.*, pp. 510-524.

Another helpful way to consider satire, when reflecting on the film, is as a discursive practice. Which is precisely how Paul Simpson has analysed it. For him, satire can include all kinds of genres and registers. He argues, "satire is *not* a genre of discourse but a discursive practice that does things *to* and *with* genres of discourse. As satire therefore has the capacity to subsume and assimilate other discourse genres, it can only be appropriately situated in a position beyond that established for genre."[756] He begins by locating satire within the global framework of humorous discourse, following Ziv's key humour functions (the aggressive, the sexual, the social, the defensive and the intellectual), he states that satire clearly has an aggressive function (it singles out an object of attack), it has a social function (group bonds are consolidated in "successful" satire), and it also has an intellectual function "because it relies upon linguistic creativity which extends the full resources of the system of language."[757] What is essential for Simpson is that satirical discourse is not an alien form of humour, it is not something remote from everyday social interaction, it is part of the communicative competence of adult participants in the shape of puns, jokes and funny stories. Simpson views it as "a familiar part of the territory of everyday humour practices."[758]

What Simpson means when he states that satire is a *discursive practice* is that satire functions as a higher-order discourse, in the Foucaultian sense. Satire requires a *genus* (a system of institutions and a framework of beliefs and knowledge) and an *impetus* (which derives from a perceived disapprobation). In terms of linguistic properties, a satirical work functions by referencing and activating an anterior discursive event, which can be another text, another genre, another register of discourse. In this sense, satire has a common element with the essay, where there is always a reference to a prior object or event, most commonly a discursive event. In the case at hand this prior discursive event would be the audio and visual material concerning the US government's official position towards nuclear weapons during the first decades of the Cold War.

The construction of satirical discourse has to do with altering the texture or pressure of the liminal space around its target, and one way of doing that is saturation. Under this characterization, it is not a stretch to consider *The Atomic Cafe* as satirical work. According to Simpson, if something comes to us pre-saturated, it leaves little

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[756] Simpson, Paul. *On the Discourse of Satire: Towards a Stylistic Model of Satirical Humor*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003, p.76.
[757] *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
[758] *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.

discourse room for manoeuvre.[759] Here is where nostalgia plays in important role for the effectiveness of *The Atomic Cafe*, nostalgia films and retro fashion had attenuated the saturation, paradoxically, by making it present via integrating it, it makes it more difficult to differentiate aesthetically form the current imagery. What *The Atomic Cafe* does by not reconstructing the look of an era but using its images directly is single it out once again, separate it, frame it and by that very operation create a space where satire is possible, inflating the target through saturation.

3.4. PLAYFUL, SUBVERSIVE MONTAGE

In the first chapter of this thesis, Esfir Shub's film was seen in relation an ontological understanding of the photographic image, based on the faith in the camera's ability to portray objective truths, because of its mechanical ability to produce "traces". Shub's filmic operation was an act of *museization* of sorts, her use of images of the past as archaeological fragments that construct an exemplary discourse offer a specific mode of *re-consignation*, one that still implies the belief in objective, something that can be related to modern myths and master narratives. *The Atomic Cafe*, however, cannot be seen in the same light. It is a product of its time, both in its format (replication of a televisual structure of a time that television inceasently broadcast reruns side by side with current programing), and the technological context it was produced in (a moment of expansion for VCRs and home video markets), as well as the theoretical context (New Historicism and Postmodernism). Its reordering of signs, its re-consignation, is subversive as was Shub's in the sense that it subverts the original meaning of the footage, but it goes a step further by commenting on both on the ideology, or ideologies, behind the images as well as on the modes of distribution of sound and moving image.

The Atomic Cafe presents several contradictions: on the one hand, it reflects a disregard for ultimate truths and, on the other hand, there still is a desire for "real images." They do not approach images in the same sense as Shub, who spoke of "authentic images." It is not so much of "life caught unaware" - although certain "out-

[759] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

takes" are essential in the film, such as Truman's laugh. Most of the scenes they use in the film are not traditional documentary films, but they are not part of mainstream fiction films either. They are marginal productions, such as training films, commercial adds and educative features; and they are filled with "simulations," such as drills and reenactments. There is a lot of "make believe" that seems to insist on the "falsity" of what the films initially strive to portray. However they are the "real constructions" of the 1950s.

The directors use images of the past to comment on the present. We can get a clear sense of the directors intention with the following quote taken from *The Atomic Cafe* book: "By juxtaposing the realities of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the testing of atomic and hydrogen bombs with ludicrous "training" films, the cynicism of politicians, the commercial exploitation of everything "atomic", and the tragically hysterical reaction to the "Commie" threat, the creators of this film (…) bring a sense of urgent immediacy to the present-day hotting-up of the cold war."[760] Just as Shub had done, juxtaposition is used to contrast old official statements with condescending public 'information,' "designed to assure the viewer that nuclear war is survivable and nothing to worry about."[761] The film is "montage-based" in the sense that it produces ideas through juxtaposition. The editing contrasts contradictory information, Jon Wiener suggests the montage style could be called "roughly Eisensteinian," [762] although I find it more precise to call it "Shubian," for it replicates her "ironic juxtapositions." This is perceptible in many scenes, such as Tibbets declaration of how he believes that the government feels some kind of guilt complex towards his role in the bombings of Hiroshima and these declarations are followed by the word "PEACE" taking over the screen and scenes of celebration. Another example of this ironic juxtaposition can be found when soldiers criticise how a woman, who is making a case for communism, speaks of the country that gives her freedom of speech, which is followed by the McCarthy hearings. Or when we hear the declarations of a representative of the AEC that the natives of certain islands in the Pacific are safe and happy after the Castle-Bravo test while we see images of the their injuries caused by radiation. *The Atomic Cafe* is ironical in a new way, one that Shub could not have been in her film, that is, in the contrast between sounds and images. There are many moments when the spoken

[760] Rafferty, Loader and Rafferty, *op. cit*.
[761] Erickson, *op. cit*.
[762] Wiener, Jon, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

words are in direct opposition to the images we are shown, and there are others when we hear so-called "bomb songs", which are cheery and frivolous, over scenes that are, to say the least, worrying. But probably the prevailing contrast is in the juxtaposition of the stark reality of the bomb tests, the bombings of the Japanese cities, the Korean invasion and the Rosenberg case with the "clumsily staged anti-communist mini-dramas and bland advertisements for shopping centers as 'the concrete expression of practical American idealism'."[763]

Shub was also credited for including longer shots in her film, which made some critics insist on her "veracity" portraying historical moments, when compared to Vertov's fast-paced editing that was falling out of favour, accused of being excessive and artificial. Some of the most revealing moments of *The Atomic Cafe* also recur to long, or at least longer, shots; such as the inclusion of Paul Tibbets full speech, which is not usually heard in this extent, showing contradictory emotions.[764] What "long shots" such as these reveal are the cuts, the omissions, which point to a hierarchy of images, to what comes to be regarded as useless, as waste or as toxic material. Television history is full of outtakes, which is not surprising when one thinks of the tight constraints on the content that could be broadcast, as well as the imperatives of entertainment and correctness, in a time when it was more important for scientific educators and newscasters to be charismatic on the small screen than to really have any knowledge of what they are talking about. It is all part of a staging strategy, the professionalization of the medium and the detachment between knowledge and its representation.

3.4.1. VOICES TUNING IN AND OUT

One of the defining features of *The Atomic Cafe* is the lack of a classic voice of God narrator. The choice to go ahead without such a narrator has a crucial effect on the kind of film it creates and is quite revealing as a statement. On the one hand, by not having one dominating voice, but several narrators coming and going the film mimics the fragmented experience of television and radio broadcast, but also the experience of receiving information in general. Throughout the film we see many shots of people listening to their radios and watching their televisions, tuning their dials or switching on

[763] Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[764] Erickson, *op. cit*.

their TV sets, this tuning in and tuning out are a used as transitioning between scenes and across the years, and create a sense of continuous expectation. For Boyle this is a clear reference to "Mass media's influential – and questionable – role as vehicle of American propaganda and misinformation."[765]

On the other hand, it marks a clear distance to the source material it uses, that is, it refuses to use the same audio strategy than the instructional films and news broadcasts it recycles. So, in a sense, we do not have one authoritative narrator, but several, and the overall effect is that the end up cancelling each other out. According to Wiener, all these narrators "speak with the trappings of authority, but each represents a kind of 'unreliable narrator'."[766] And, what is more, the truth is found not in any of the spoken words, but rather in the filmmakers' juxtaposition of visual documents. If there is a truth, is that truth itself is hard to locate, and that thought is the product of the juxtaposition of narrators as much as the juxtaposition of images, and it is the spectator's role to decide what he or she believes, questions, or deduces. None of these narrators have the whole story; neither does the spectator, but we must arrive to our own conclusions with what we have at hand, and what we miss or feel is lacking. One effect of listening to professional news anchors in television is that history becomes a flow of events whose currency depends on their materialization as consumable events, presented through a singular reliable agent, what Corrigan calls "anchored agency." One consequence is that "the viewer, too frequently, becomes the silent subject of a media history passively positioned before the unmalleable facts of the everyday."[767] The form of the conventional historical documentary includes a narrator as "the indispensable voice of meaning, and the explainer of the significance of the visual materials."[768] In other words, meaning is communicated through words written in a script. By juxtaposing all these narrating voices we can also appreciate how similar, practically interchangeable, they are. The newscasters and professional actors who supply their voice are barely indistinguishable among themselves; the tone, the language used, and very notably the fact that they are all male voices render them uniform. Of course this invisibility, or more precisely inaudibility, of women in the news and factual discourses is part of a larger trend in television. Gloria Steinem argues, "female reporters were kept

[765] Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
[766] Wiener, Jon, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
[767] Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
[768] Wiener, Jon, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

out of television and radio for years by the argument that their voices were too high, grating, or nonauthoritative to speak the news credibly."[769]

For some the lack of a "main narrator" or a Voice of God narration in *The Atomic Cafe* is a grave flaw,[770] whereas for others it is one of the film's strengths. Boyle defends, "There is no voice-over narration because non is needed, the filmmakers manipulate their material so invisibly – using ironic juxtaposition of film clip to film clip, or film with divergent music or speech – that their massaged message is wittily hammered home in every cut."[771] All three directors were convinced of the decision to not use an overall voice-of-God narrator, even when film director John G. Avildsen offered to get comedian John Belushi to narrate the film.[772] It also distances them from other projects that shared certain similarities, such as Tom Johnson and Lance Bird's *No Place to Hide* (1981), which was also made of clippings from the official films of the 1950s covering the bomb-shelter craze. Johnson and Bird opted to have this television film narrated by actor and political activist Martin Sheen.[773] Emile de Antonio, similarly turned down the opportunity to have Paul Newman narrate *Point of Order*, which he volunteered to do for free.[774] When de Antonio explained why he avoided voice of God narration in his films, he described the voices of news anchors as hollow voices that just read what writers write. Instead, he looks for the integral fact in which the man who says it is the man who wrote it, believed and experienced it. *The Atomic Cafe* does a similar operation, we hear Truman, we hear Nixon, we hear Paul Tibbets, they are speaking in their own name without any introduction from an omniscient narrator. However, *The Atomic Cafe* also includes the voices of multiple news anchors, reporters and narrators from instructional films; the fact that there is no overriding voice that orders these voices and puts them into contexts, creates the effect of giving us old televisual discourse itself, which is as much a protagonist of the film as the men mentioned above. The Cold War of the 1950s became America's first "television war," the news on TV brought the international struggle, as the dominant ideologies represented it, into millions of homes. It was, mainly, television that "plunged the

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[769] Steinem, Gloria. "Men and Women Talking." In *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, 176-90. London: Flamingo, 1983, p.187.
[770] Auty argues "they have chosen simply, and inadequately to 'let the material speak for itself'." Auty, *op. cit.,* p. 289.
[771] Boyle*, op. cit.*, p. 39.
[772] "www.conelrad.com ; and IMDB, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083590/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv
[773] Titus, A. Costandina. "Old Footage through a New Lens." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* XI, no. 1 (Spring 1983 1983): 2-11, p. 5; and IMDB, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0262652/?ref_=nm_knf_t3
[774] Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

nation into a bath of Cold War clichés and fear – an inundation of propagandistic images [and voices] which urged public thought to support unquestioningly the policies of the United States Government."[775]

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the use or lack of a narrator was a much-discussed issue, it had been so for some years. *Cinéma verité* and direct cinema also had refused to use "authoritarian" voice-over narration, with the aim of not letting a voice derive authority apart from the person speaking, the words being spoken, and the particulars of the occasion.[776] It is in this sense that it might be easier to understand the film as a "compilation verité" as proclaimed by Loader. Interestingly, Jeffrey Youdelman speaks of a workshop at the 1979 Conference for Alternative Cinema of Bard College, where voice-over narration was rejected by most participants, what was rejected was the "detached, authoritarian male voice" like the voice of *The March of Time*. As Youdelman argues "Progressive filmmakers have just reason to reject these particular models, but they neither exhaust the vast possibilities for narration today nor represent the sum total of the past."[777]

3.4.2. THE SKY ON THE SCREEN

If, as Benjamin argued, the First World War had resulted in the loss of experience, the effects of Second World War and the atomic bombs that represented its final chapter were no less devastating and shocking. Again the individual would see his capacities to bring events in line with the past challenged. I would like to quote his words regarding the outcome of the Great War once again, "never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic

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[775] MacDonald, J. Fred. "The Cold War as Entertainment in the Fifties Television." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* VII, no. 1 (1978): 3-31, pp. 3-4.

[776] Rothman, William. *The I of the Camera. Essays in Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics*. Second ed. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 285.

[777] However, many of these filmmakers assembled at Bard were in for a surprise with the projection of documentaries of the 1930s and 1940s, "When Leo Hurwitz's *Strange Victory* (1948) was screened (…), the audience was mesmerized by a style of filmmaking most had not seen before: a film composed by the now rejected method of montage, full of varied sequences, mixing newsreel and acted episodes. The film is held together by a narrative voice that assumes many styles and personas and by an overall structure that (…) gives the film the density of a poem." Another revelation came with the work of Joris Ivens, who saw narration as a part of an orchestrated totality, whose used voices that were not dull and detached, making documentaries that experimented with rhythmic synchronization between words, images and music." Youdelman, Jeffrey. "Narration, Invention, & History: A Documentary Dilemma." *Cineaste* 12, no. 2 (1982): 8-15, p. 9.

experience of inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body."[778] The first part of the statement is practically transferable to the experience of the Second World War. The second part is not, now even the sky had changed, it had held the iconic and devastating mushroom cloud. The cloud that could bring a certain death, not only to the fragile bodies underneath it, but to many, many more further away in space and in time; these clouds now represented the real possibility of total annihilation.

With this in mind, in what follows I would like to turn to what I consider one of the most important scenes of the film, not only because it has been the centre of some controversy regarding the use of fictional images as stand-ins for non existent factual images, but because of what it is supposed to represent. I am referring to the very brief sequence of the smartly dressed Japanese civilian. It is one of the images that is repeated in the film, together with the images of the mushroom clouds resulting from the detonations of different atomic and hydrogen bombs, which will also be seen in some detail further down.

3.4.2.1. The Man that Looks to the Sky

Right before we see the bomb being dropped over Hiroshima we see several low angle shots of civilians on the streets of a Japanese city. Among them we see the image of a well-dressed man who looks to the sky. In the context of *The Atomic Cafe* this image represents an inhabitant of Hiroshima looking up trying to imagine what is about to happen. It is quite obvious the image comes from a different source than the other footage in the film, the sequence it is taken from a fiction film and not just any fiction film, but a Japanese production.[779] It offers an uncommon point of view in the official US accounts, that of those under the bomb, and it creates a great tension through the

[778] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," p. 84.
[779] All authors agree this sequence comes from a Japanese fiction film, but I have been unable to pinpoint exactly which film it is cut from. According to Russell, it is quite possibly from a Godzilla film, Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

precise combination of scene, which "narrativize the impending destruction of the city."[780]

Paul Arthur takes issue with this sequence, for him, it is generic and "its presence defies any logic of direct recording."[781] Arthur finds it confusing, misleading, he states that the montage "disturbs our understanding of documentary protocol; that is, the shot nexus is clearly a narrative editing trope that both heightens dramatic anticipation and elicits pathos for a specific individual."[782] Bruzzi agrees that this image represents a 'generic' Japanese man.[783] But, to Arthur's argument of how this scene is misleading, she responds that this sequence would probably be viewed as symbolic as opposed to accurately representative. And what is more, "Arthur's problems with the sequence are interesting because of what they suggest about the political manipulation of images."[784] *The Atomic Cafe* constantly defies any logic of direct recording and of "pure factual discourse," if one can speak of such a thing. That is precisely the point, it deals with "factual films" that are fantasies, that are based on simulations (such as *Duck and Cover*); and it uses a fractions of fiction films and television ads to give us a very real feel of the imagery of a certain period. This contrast is one of the more interesting features of the films editing, it points out to one key characteristic of its source material: the dominance of the recourse to simulation, which played a crucial role in films issued by governmental agencies for educational purposes. According to Russell simulation is a key aspect of the films used in *The Atomic Cafe*, as well as in *The Atomic Cafe* itself: "As a species of allegory, found footage enables us to separate fiction from what escapes its narrative control. There are no people in this film, only images of people, and in their absence, the film points to their annihilation within atomic culture as it displaces reality with a simulated version."[785] The fact that the directors use an image from a Japanese fiction film to put a human face, a relatable face, looking up at the sky, instead of limiting the Hiroshima part of the film to American propaganda is brilliant. He is a civilian form the "other side", an "enemy" and does not look how an enemy is supposed to look. This is especially interesting if we take into account how the "Japanese enemy" was stereotyped during the Second World War on behalf the American propaganda industry. According to Michael Renov, the Japanese were

[780] Beattie, *op. cit.*, p. 140-141.
[781] Arthur, "The Status of Found Footage," pp. 64-65.
[782] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[783] Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.
[784] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[785] Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-256.

"othered" with far greater vehemence than the European nemesis.[786] What is also interesting is that he is not victimized, although we know what is about to happen to him (within the narrative of the film). This sequence shows what is not to be seen anywhere else: a Japanese civilian that is not that different to the American civilians that are shown driving cars, shopping or going about their own lives in the rest of the film. Not only are we getting a glimpse from a non-official source, we are seeing how this "enemy," this "Other," is not that different, in fact he is quite relatable. Also, since it is taken from a Japanese fiction film, we are seeing him through his own eyes (as it were). It is not an American representation of a Japanese man, but an image from the Japanese film industry; therefore, the directors are making room for Japan as an image builder in its own right, as a nation with agency to represent itself.

To disqualify the image of the Japanese man looking upwards as unauthentic leaves us with little more to say; however, it offers a specific its problematic, that of a void, an absence. It is clearly not the directors' intention to pass this image as a "factual image", but to remember there is another point of view and nowhere is this shown by the agencies that fill the screens with nuclear propaganda. As Bruzzi states, *The Atomic Cafe*, in this instance (as well as others), is working through insinuation. In her eloquent words, "The unsuspecting, smart Japanese man is an Everyman figure, a representative character who not only functions as a cog within the Hiroshima narrative – a personalised reaction to the imminent arrival of the Enola Gay – but as a more abstract presence within the subliminal subtext underpinning the whole film: that what was being practised in the 1950s was an elaborate form of disavowal whereby the American government knew but denied and actively suppressed the true horrors of nuclear arms under a ludicrously inane arsenal of propaganda films."[787] Regular American citizens did not fully know what the atomic bomb did to the Japanese cities. In Lifton and Mitchell's words, this was "partly due to psychological resistance, but it was also the result of secrecy, distortion, and suppression that would persist, and have profound effects, for decades."[788] One of the aspects of the bomb considered as too sensitive to be shared were the real effects of radiation, it "symbolized the special horror of the new weapon and introduced an element of moral ambiguity. It seemed comparable to the

[786] Renov, Michael. "Warring Images: Stereotype and American Representations of the Japanese (1941-1991)." In *The Subject of Documentary*, 43-68. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, p. 55
[787] Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[788] Lifton and Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

effects of poison gas, which warring nations had stockpiled but generally refused to use."[789]

It is only fitting that there should be a "Japanese everyman figure," for we are bombarded with the "American everyman figure" everywhere in the American media of the 1950s. The sobriety of the sequence, compared to the glossiness of American publicity and the over dramatization of the educational governmental films makes him seem as one of the more humane figures in the film.The second time this man appears in the film is near the end. This time it is even more chilling in the sense that he seems premonitory. It gives the feeling that "that could soon be us," which is further emphasized with the images that are edited together while the credits start to role.

3.4.2.2. The Mushroom Cloud

> "The mobilization of images to cover the threat of mutual assured destruction in the 1950s culminates in the spectacle of the mushroom cloud itself. Found-footage filmmaking picks up the pieces of the media façade and reconfigures the fragments as visible evidence of the fiction of history produced in that era." Catherine Russell[790]

A very revealing recourse in the film is the times when the explosion of the bomb is treated as an aesthetic experience; there are several mentions of the atomic explosion as a "beautiful sight." It is as if the image of the blast, and more specifically the iconic mushroom cloud that most commonly represents it, takes centre stage displacing any other kinds of issues. The image of the mushroom cloud is crucial, for it is the most recognizable symbol of the atomic bomb, yet it shows almost nothing. The cloud was almost immediately recognized as a symbol of US power, "the government quickly promoted it to instil awe and fear in the citizenry and thereby build support for Cold War defense policies."[791] But it was a contradictory symbol, according to Titus, it

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[789] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[790] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 258.
[791] Titus, A. Constandina. "The Mushroom Cloud as Kitsch." In *Atomic Culture: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, edited by Scott C. Zeman and Michael A. Amundsen, 101-23. Boulder: University Press Colorado, 2004, p. 102.

was the "symbol of everything good about America and simultaneously evil about the Soviet Union."[792]

Its importance in the 1950s cannot be overstated. It even became a commodity, in the sense that mushroom cloud-shaped merchandise was incredible popular. The media coverage "facilitated the mass distribution of this emotion-laden symbol but also drew on the awesome beauty of the fireball to enhance the message. Spectacular imagery, poetic references, and colorful hyperbole focused the public's collective eye on the aesthetics of the mushroom cloud and glossed over the dangers that resulted from radioactive fallout."[793]

The mushroom cloud was not the only symbolic representation of the atomic bomb. There were others such as the Genie, the Giant, and the ball of fire. The explosion of the atomic bomb also received many appellatives and descriptions, such as "multi-colored surging cloud," "giant column", "chimney-shaped column", "dome-shaped column", "parasol", "great funnel", "geyser", "convoluting brain", "raspberry", "pillar of smoke shaped like a parachute", and "cauliflower cloud." But the reporters at the Bikini and Trinity tests mentioned the term "mushroom" more than any other.[794] In the 1950s a scholar by the name of R.G. Wasson studied the symbolism of fungi. According to this study, in Western culture the mushroom can be associated to dark places, death and poison, as well as food and life. It also is present in folk tales associated with witches and fairies and, hence, with magic. And it also appears in the mythologies of other cultures, Wasson found it held relevant place in some Hindu and medieval Chinese Taoism texts. Which makes Weart arrive to the conclusion that the mushroom cloud was some kind of folk symbol, created by nobody in particular for reasons that nobody explained.[795]

In a society where cultural signs are being created and disseminated by the media, it is quite fitting that such a "folk symbol" were to have a new characteristic, that of being an example of American kitsch. This is what Titus defends, the mushroom cloud in its origins was an instrument of "political kitsch, which later became a symbol of Cold War nostalgic kitsch.[796] *The Atomic Café* masterfully points in both directions.

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[792] A. Constandina Titus, "The Mushroom Cloud as Kitsch," in *Atomic Culture: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (eds) Scott C. Zeman and Michael A. Amundsen, University Press Colorado, 2004, pp. 101-123, cit. p. 109.
[793] A. Constandina Titus, "The Mushroom Cloud as Kitsch," p. 107.
[794] Weart, *op. cit.*, p. 402.
[795] Weart, *op. cit.*, p. 402-403.
[796] Titus, "The Mushroom Cloud as Kitsch", p. 102.

The film was signalling to the nostalgia of the period that was already being expressed by other media and in other kinds of film, such as the nostalgia film (which has been dealt with in detail above). However, Loader herself has noted that the film had quite an influence on the publicity of the 1980s. In her words, "I think it changed American culture in certain ways in terms of how people see stock footage and other propaganda. For example, it really influenced advertising. It made stock footage kind of cool and trendy, so a lot of advertisers started to use that in their work. That's the place you can see it most clearly, and it really led to the growth of a commercial stock footage industry where one didn't exist before. I find that very interesting." [797] For Titus the film is partly responsible for this revival of the mushroom as kitsch, she argues that *The Atomic Cafe* inadvertently contributed to the re-emergence of "atomabilia".[798] I would like to stress that that was not the only effect it was to have. Jayne Loader defends "The other thing is that it made people more aware of propaganda, as a tool, and how the government has used that propaganda apparatus to get its point of view across, especially to kids in schools."[799]

Saul Friedlander makes a distinction between "common" kitsch and "uplifting" or "political" kitsch. He defends that the first is aimed at universality and uniformity, whereas the latter is symbol-cultured and emotionally linked to the values of a specific group. Common kitsch serves to promote something, mainly on commercial terms, without cultural restrictions, and uplifting kitsch, on the other hand, reinforces identification within a specific and well-defined context, mainly in ideological terms. Essential to this variant of kitsch are a series of characteristics: first, the message it conveys is simple, and for that reason easily understood by the public; second, it stimulates an unreflexive and emotional response rather than a rational one; third, it can be mass produced quickly and cheaply, thus it can be widely marketed and distributed; fourth, it combines aesthetics and politics; and, finally, it leads to the stylization of an image.[800] Following this logic Titus argues, "The U.S. government's persistently glorified depiction of the mushroom cloud throughout the late 1940s and 1950s is an excellent example of the successful exploitation of political kitsch."[801] All of the

[797] Young, *op. cit.*
[798] Titus, p. 110.
[799] Young, *op. cit.*
[800] Titus, "The Mushroom Cloud as Kitsch", p. 104.
[801] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

essential elements of Friedlander's category of uplifting kitsch were present: simple message, mass distribution, emotional response, beautiful imagery, and stylized form. After the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the first pictures that appeared in American newspapers and magazines covering the event were tightly controlled, official government releases of the mushroom cloud, not of the destruction on the ground in Japan or of the bomb itself.[802]

From the outset, descriptions of the detonations focused on the impressive mushroom cloud and were filled with theological references (such as the ones we hear from president Truman) and aesthetic impressions. Emotional reactions were exploited throughout the following decade via official press releases by the AEC and brochures, posters and films issued by the FCDA. All of these featured the iconic mushroom cloud. The image was also the centrepiece of every layout in articles in magazines such as *Time*, *Life*, *New Yorker*, and *National Geographic*. All of the journalists of these stories focused on the visual effects of the blast with vivid descriptions of the mushroom cloud and glossed over the dangers that resulted from it, especially those related to fallout.[803]

In fact the ubiquitousness of the bomb had a different effect than intended. "Nuclear imagery and actual weapons had begun to feed on one another, each helping the other to grow.[804]. The stylized image of the mushroom cloud invaded popular culture during the late 1940s and the 1950s, it materialized on commercial objects and establishments in the United States. It appeared in album covers, postcards, books, comics, sale notices, hats, cakes and neon signs. It became "the quintessential virtual symbol of the new era."[805]

3.5. CONCLUSION

One thing *The Atomic Cafe* illustrates extremely well is the deceiving notion of overabundance of images. It illustrates a time were abundance seemed to penetrate every layer of life, with overflowing options of ready made and lavishly packaged foods, shiny new cars, shopping centres, suburban houses, but when looked at closely,

[802] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[803] *Ibid*, p. 106-107.
[804] Weart, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
[805] Paul Boyer, quoted in Titus, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

the options were in fact limited to choosing between models. The images shown on television and the news heard on the radio also seem to offer a great variety of channels, but on all of those channels the message was practically the same, pronounced by the same kind of voice, the only thing that could vary was the dial one chose or the network one decided to watch. It created the impression of having resources to be informed, while it had quite the opposite effect. The best visual example of all this is the mushroom cloud itself. There is a feeling of hearing about, seeing, and reading on all things atomic, when in fact little was revealed and there was one simple image that stood for it all: the mushroom cloud. It held no information in itself, it did not reveal anything about its production, detonation, or lasting effects, but it carried with it a series of emotional responses, which could not be contrasted to facts except that it was mighty and, according to many, a beautiful sight to behold.

This leads me to two issues argued by Rancière. First, his challenging of the notion that we are drowned in a flood of images in general, and of horror in particular. He argues that in fact in is the contrary way around, "the dominant media by no means drowns us in a torrent of images testifying to massacres (…) Quite the reverse, they reduce their number, taking good care to select and order them. They eliminate from them anything that might exceed the simple superfluous illustration of their meaning. What we see above all in the news on our TV screens are the faces of the rulers, experts and journalists who comment on the images, who tell us what they show and what we should make of them."[806] Which leads him to believe that the system of information does not operate through an excess of images, but by selecting those who are entitled to "deciphering" the flow of information about anonymous multitudes, to speak for them. What is crucial for Rancière is overturning the dominant logic that makes the visual the lot of multitudes and the verbal the privilege of a few.[807] It is in this respect the essay film holds a great potential. The essay, which is considered a more personal format, a "minor genre," void of the trappings of the philosophical treatise or of entertainment values, is free to speak of any topic from a subjective standing point. It can be eccentric, creative, unmethodological, it does not have to conform, it can include contradiction and unresolved questions, which leads us to the second notion that I would like to borrow from Rancière, that of scenes of dissensus. The essay is a perfect site for scenes of dissensus. What Rancière's notion of dissensus means is that there is no obvious

[806] Ranciére, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 96.
[807] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

regime of presentation or interpretation. Every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification. And this act of cracking open the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible enables a new topography of the possible.[808] Recycling footage offers a great potential for this very act when it is concerned with images, specifically historical images that have become iconic. The repurposing of footage in an essayistic manner offers an opportunity to crack images open with the very use of those images. It offers new interpretations, asks for new perceptions, and it does so without substituting the old meanings and intentions of the images, but in dialogue with them.

As has been mention in the previous chapter, these filmic modes are demanding of the spectator, which also links to another of Rancières notions, that of the emancipated spectator. For him, this emancipation consists precisely of the power of associating and disassociating. Moreover, he contends being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. "It is our normal situation. Every spectator is already an actor in her story."[809] The directors of *The Atomic Cafe* are first of all spectators, emancipated spectators that scrutinize their material, that scavenge for more among media scraps and media waste. They weave the images they appropriate into a tightly written essay, which points in many directions and which is as complex as the very topic it covers. They do not conform to one style, not aesthetically and not even in the humour with which they write. They slide from irony to satire and back, from laugh out loud moments to chilling smiles. They leave room for thought by making their own trickery as apparent as that of the source material. They are explorative and tentative, but they are not undecided. They are critical and playful.

Recycling images, in the way *The Atomic Cafe* does, is a turning over, a reversing but it is more than that. The directors reedit these images with humour, in an almost ludic, playful manner. It might be helpful to bring into account what Agamben has to say of play in relation to history, to see what effects this playful treatment of historical traces might have. For Agamben, in play there is a freeing element from that which is sacred. He argues, that in play, man frees himself from sacred time and 'forgets' it in human time. This does not mean that the world of play is not connected to time, it is, in fact, in an even more specific sense since the world of toys show how children will play with whatever junk comes their way. A pertinent question might be

[808] *Ibid.*, p. 48-49
[809] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

what constitutes a toy? Agamben answers, in first place, everything which is old, independent of its sacred origins, is liable to become a toy; and the same appropriation and transformation in play can be achieved with objects which still belong in the sphere of use by means of miniaturization. Which makes him ask himself, what is the "essential character of the toy"? What distinguishes it from other objects is something that can be grasped only in the temporal dimension of a "once upon a time" and a "no more."[810] The toy is what belonged to the realm of the sacred or of the practical-economic, so then, the essence of the toy is an eminently *historical* thing. For Agamben, in the toy we can grasp the temporality of history in its differential and qualitative value, this distances it from a monument, which is an object of archaeological and scholarly research, and from an archive document. The toy represents something more and something different: it is not a matter of its cultural significance, its function nor its form; what the toy preserves of its sacred or economic model is the human temporality that was contained therein, its "pure historical essence." The value and meaning of the monument, the antique object, and the document are functions of their age; whereas the toy, by dismembering and distorting the past or miniaturizing the present, makes present and renders tangible human temporality in itself.[811] I believe historical moving images can be placed somewhere in between, they can hold value and meaning as documents, while at the same time be dismembered and manipulated creating new tensions between different temporalities, first, between the past and present (of the moment of production of the film in which they are re-edited) and, second, between both those times and the moment of their viewing, which will always be further in the future.

The discourses we hear in *The Atomic Cafe* no longer inspire what they once did, the sanctimoniousness of Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon and others feels like a charade. Not that they are not dealing with grave issues. But what they say together with what we know, and had come to be known in 1982, makes their words work differently. Regardless of if what they are saying is precisely what they think, they are performing for the camera. In this sense they have also acquired the role of the newscaster as described by Rotheman, the "newscaster's role, however revised, however 'personalized,' nonetheless remains a role, a mask, no less so when the newscaster

[810] Agamben, Giorgio "In Playland. Reflections on History and Play." In *Infancy and History. The Destruction of Experience*, 73-96. London and New York: Verso, 2007," p. 79.
[811] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

appears to be dropping his mask."[812] This seems to be one effect of the wide distribution and assimilation of television as a means for receiving information; all those who appear on it seem to interpret a role. This automatically creates a distinction between what is worthy of broadcast and what is not. And this way of selecting some material and disregarding other material is essential to the shape historical images take. This is what makes working with outtakes, moving image waste, so interesting, so full of potential. This playing with audiovisual scraps can be seen as de-sacralising operation of historical images, there is a certain change of order, a pulling down from a higher sphere (one that is legitimised) to a more mundane one (one that can be toyed with, contradicted, made fun of, and remain open ended).

It is not uncommon for many directors of found footage to recur to Débord's notion of *détournement*, which designates the allegorical sense of the dialectical image. Débord's practices of appropriation were intended as an analysis of "the function of the spectacle" in modern society.[813] What is interesting is how this, just like play, happens through an operation of "taking out" and "putting together" scraps belonging to different objects. Just like *bricolage* in Lévi-Strauss' terms transformed old signified into signifiers and old signifiers into signified, the juxtaposition of pre-existing elements (sequences of moving images) extracted from their original contexts (films, television adds, news, etc), diverted from their original and intended uses, thus, they yield previously unrecognized significance.[814]

Just as the toy's transforms the use of the original it imitates, the second viewing of these images cannot inspired what they once did. Agamben also considers the toy in relation to Lévi-Strauss' notion of *bricolage*, they both use "crumbs" and "scraps" belonging to other structural wholes, as does the film made of archival footage. The toy plays with more than just crumbs and scraps, it plays with the "crumbness" itself. A *bricoleur* is a collector, and "the collector extracts the object from its diachronic distance or its synchronic proximity and gathers it into the remote adjacence of history."[815] For Agamben, play, on the other hand, is furnished a symmetrically opposed operation to that of the collector: it tends to break the connection between past and present, and to break down and crumble the whole structure into events."[816]

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[812] Rothman, *op. cit.*, p. 287.
[813] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
[814] Wees, *Recycled Images*, p. 52.
[815] Agamben, "In Playland. Reflections on History and Play," pp. 80-81, cit. p. 81.
[816] *Ibid.,* pp. 82-83, cit. p. 83.

Recycling archival footage can be seen as playing with historical traces, it is a serious game, but sometimes it seems that playing is the only way we can find unsuspected constellations and meanings, since playing remains open and responds to its own rules. Playing with images has complex and problematic effects, but because images themselves are more complex than they are sometimes credited. For Ranciére an image is an element in a system that creates a certain sense of reality, a certain common sense. This common sense is a community of sensible data, things whose visibility is supposed to be shareable by all, sharable modes of perception and shareable meanings that are conferred on them.[817] The image is not the duplicate of a thing, or not only; it is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid. It is not just the reproduction of what is out there in front of the filmmaker; it is always an alteration that occurs in a chain of images, which alter it in turn.[818] In his words, "Images of art do not supply weapons for battles. They help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently, a new landscape of the possible."[819]

For these reasons I understand Russell's claim that *The Atomic Cafe* could only be a found-footage film. In Russell's eloquent words, this is so "because it is about the representation of rational control, which falls apart precisely on its fabricated status, its void of referentiality;" when children are performing their fear of nuclear holocaust it is only "a paranoid symptom of the apparatus of power that has created the image, to circulate as a perpetuation of the paranoia, to augment its power, and so on."[820] The film deals with a battle that was fought on an image level, it enters into the mechanisms that created it, the implications it would have and it fights back with those very images. It points to a phenomenon that was occurring at the time of its production, a "Stockholm syndrome of nostalgia" if you will. But to be able to argument its claims it does so as a humoristic essay, or at least as a work that has humoristic and essayistic cualities, which replicates the very structure of what is under scrutiny. It is questioning the past *and* the present, the images *and* the channels of distribution.

[817] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 102.
[818] *Ibid.*, p. 93-94.
[819] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[820] Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

Chapter 4

GLEANING FOR IMAGES: *VIDEOGRAMS OF A REVOLUTION*

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Videograms of a Revolution is a film directed by Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica that covers Ceausescu's downfall in December 1989 in Romania. It explores the events caught on camera from December 21st to December 25th in rigorous chronological order. It combines images broadcast by the national television with other sequences shot by amateurs and international journalists. The images are scrutinized, repeated, confronted and questioned. At times there is a female narrator that gives us some details and that questions the images, what they show as well as what they miss. The film was conceived within a heated debate in French and German media theory, by two directors deeply involved in the discussion.[821] There were many doubts at the time concerning the events and the following months, in spite of the "flood of images" that were broadcast. The news that was emitted at the time, was soon contradicted, the estimated number of victims in Timisoara was revised from thousands to hundreds. In January of 1990 on German television Romanian doctors confirmed that widely broadcast images of the bodies of the supposed victims of the rebellion actually showed autopsied corpses from a nearby hospital. In April 1990 French television aired the trial and execution of Nicolai and Elena Ceausescu, it was later revealed that about six hours after their deaths, the Ceausescus had been re-executed for television. The events and actors of December 1989 remained just as nebulous, if not more. There were many indignant responses in the West, a series of conferences and publications followed, with contributions by Serge Daney, Vilém Flusser and Paul Virilo; and Jean Baudrillard coined the term "Timisoara Syndrome."[822] One of the voices in the debate was Romanian writer Andrei Ujica, who had published a collection of essays and discussions on the events in Romania in 1990.

Andrei Ujica was born in Timisoara, Romania, in 1951. He began writing fiction as a young man, in his words, "I started to write as early as high school, prose at first, and that's when my passion for cinema also started. Unlike literature, however, I didn't do anything about it, always having this absurd conviction that one day this will happen by itself."[823] He immigrated to Germany in 1981, where he studied and got an assistant

[821] Kernbauer, Eva. "Establishing Belief: Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica, *Videograms of a Revolution*." *Grey Room*, no. 41 (Fall 2010 2010): 72-87, p. 75.
[822] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[823] White, Rob. "Interview with Andrei Ujica." *Film Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (Spring 2011 2011): 66-71, p. 67.

post at the University of Manheim, with a specialty in literary theory and film theory.[824] That is where the events of December 1989 found him, and in 1990 he published, together with theorist and photography historian Hubertus von Amelunxen a book called *Television/Revolution: The Ultimatum of the Images – Romania in December 1989*. This book contained, among other things, dialogues Ujica had had with Romanian intellectuals, friends from youth, two from Timisoara and two from Bucharest, who had witnessed the events both first hand and on television.[825] This book would inspire his first film, *Videograms of a Revolution*,[826] which was done in collaboration with Harun Farocki. This film would be the first instalment of his trilogy, which was followed by *Out of the Present* (1995), that covers cosmonaut Sergei Kirkalev's stay in the Russian space station Mir while the USSR unravels; and *The Autobiography of Nicolai Ceausescu* (2010), which offers a portrait of Nicolai Ceausescu that spans from the death of his predecessor to the dictators own demise, constructed with the footage stored in the Romanian Television Archive and the National Film Archive of Romania.[827] Ujica has been a professor of film at the University of the Arts and Design Karlsruhe since 2001, and founded the ZKM Film Institute in 2002, where works as the centre's director since its foundation.[828]

Farocki brought to the collaboration his long-standing experience as an independent filmmaker, writer, and activist, as well as a rich oeuvre examining visual representation and technologies of information.[829] Harun El Usman Faroqui (who would later change his name to Harun Farocki) was born to an Indian father and a German mother in 1944 in Neutitschein, today Novy Jicin (Czech Republic). He would have been born in Berlin, but his family left the city because of the bombings. He spent part of his childhood in India and Indonesia, before going back to Germany in 1953. When he was young he was a rebellious aspiring writer, in 1962, in his own words "I ran away [from home] once and for all, moved to West Berlin and, following the beatniks' example, I scraped a living with casual jobs," and he started publishing reviews and

[824] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[825] *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.
[826] Filimon, Monica. "Review of Autobiografy of Nicolae Ceausescu." *Cineaste* XXXVII, no. 1 (Winter 2011 2011): 51-53, p. 51.
[827] White, Rob, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
[828] "Andrei Ujica Short Biography", Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltlung Karlsruhe Wesite, https://www.hfg-karlsruhe.de/lehrende/professoren/prof-andrei-ujica.html
[829] Kernbauer, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

short literary texts.[830] In 1966 he made his first three-minute film for television and was admitted to the newly founded Berlin Film Academy (DFFB), from which he would be expelled twice. The first time, in 1967, was because he did not pass the course, however, he was readmitted for another trial year; and then again in 1968 due to his political activism. Together with other students, he occupied the director's office in protest for the banning of a student who had written against the School's director, an act that got all of them expelled.[831] His early films proceeded from a "guerrilla" thinking and borrowed formal devices from Situationism, the French New Wave and Direct Cinema.[832] Among his film school colleagues and friends were Holger Meins, Wolfgang Petersen and Harmut Bitomsky, with the latter he would collaborate intensely in his early films and workshops. Farocki and Bitomsky did not feel the enthusiasm many of their contemporary filmmakers did for the present, which filtered everything in their work through its immediate political use.[833] That is not to say there were not political, but Farocki understood subversion differently. He thought his protest movement, both in his films and his actions, had to be an intervention, a nuisance, and they had to serve as a recrimination to the common programming of film and television.[834]

It could be said that *Videograms of a Revolution* is a quintessential Farocki film, in the sense that most of Farocki's films problematize technologies of visual representation and reproduction; many of them do so by exposing the views inculcated by mass media and contrasting them with atypical or more independent coverage of the same events.[835] Among his influences we can easily trace Brecht, Walter Benjamin's critique of "mechanical reproducibility" and Hans Magnus Enzensberger's notion of "consciousness industry," and contemporary critical theory's exposure of the totalitarian

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[830] Farocki, Harun. "Written Trailers." In *Harun Farocki against What? Against Whom?*, edited by Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun, 220-41. London: Koenig Books and Raven Row, 2009, p. 221.
[831] Farocki, Harun. "Aprender Lo Elemental." In *Desconfiar De Las Imágenes*, 39-60. Buenos Aires: Caja Negra Editora, 2014, p. 44.
[832] Didi-Huberman, Georges. "How to Open Your Eyes." In *Against What? Against Whom?*, edited by Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun, 38-50. London: Koenig Books and Raven Row, 2009, p. 39.
[833] Farocki, "Aprender lo elemental", p. 43.
[834] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[835] Alter, Nora M. "The Political Im/Perceptible: Farocki's Images of the World and the Inscription of War." In *Projecting History: German Nonfiction Cinema, 1967-2000*, 77-102. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2002, p. 78.

aspect of enlightenment,[836] as well as the ideas of Vilém Flusser, and the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Daniel Huillet and Jean-Luc Godard.[837]

4.2. THE FILM

4.2.1. SYNOPSIS

The film starts in a striking manner. The first thing we hear and see is a wounded woman in a hospital. The only element that precedes this sequence are the words "A Harun Farocki Production," there is no title, we have not been introduced to the film, although we are aware that that is what it is. The film starts with this jump straight into action, as if it were a rough cut, something that has just been shot, which gives the sensation that this sequence has just been found. The woman on the screen soon realises she is being filmed and turns to address the camera. Her words are loaded and her tone is emotional, her gaze seems to be lost. She has been at a demonstration in Timisoara, she recounts what she witnessed and expresses her hope in change. Afterwards, the title of the film appears on screen.

The first image after the initial film credits is a scene shot by an amateur videographer in his student dormitory, it focuses on the streets, on a blurry procession of people in the background, we hear the voice of a narrator, again it is a female voice, but this time it is a voice devoid of emotion and we do not see the person talking on screen. It is this voice that informs us that we are in a student dormitory and it is this voice that lets us know that "the camera is in danger." The image shot by this camera is divided in two, the larger portion of the image, so the voice tells us, the forefront is composed of buildings, the event is in the background, the lens has its limits as the narrator points out, it gets "as close to the event as the camera allows".

After these two scenes, which are quite unusual for traditional documentaries because of their poor quality and because they do not seem central to the story, at least not immediately, we are confronted by a specific date, December 21st 1989, and the image of Ceausescu at the balcony of the Central Committee building. The broadcast of

[836] Alter, *Projecting History*, p. 78.
[837] Harun Farocki, "Written Trailers", p. 226; Didi-Huberman, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

Ceausescu from this precise place is a "classical image" for the Romanian public, there is nothing out of the ordinary in it, Ceausescu speaks from above, the crowd listens bellow and the television audience watches the state television from home. Ceausescu starts to give one of his typical speeches, as he has done so many times before, but something happens. These images were to be broadcasted live on the state television, however, something stops the dictator in his track and the transmission is interrupted. The film continues by showing the images from one of the cameras covering the event, which in the moment of the interrupted broadcast pans to the sky, as it was instructed to do if anything occurred. The female narrator points out "the command communication had broken down."

The image of this interruption is repeated and within it, in the lower left side of the frame another image is introduced. One image will comment on the other. In one we see the sky and in the other a blank, the former is larger and it is what the camera was capturing, the latter is smaller and reproduces what the Romanian public was receiving through their television sets. When the television broadcast comes back, first it only emits audio.

The film continues by showing people leaving the square. Afterwards we see once again Ceausescu during the interruption of his speech, we see his face during the beginning of the disturbance, as the narrator's voice says, "something rivets his gaze," there is a technical disturbance. We see the images of a different camera that records of streams of people leaving. The narrator points out "no indication of the nature of the disturbances." Again we see images shot by an amateur, images of the interior of a home, the camera focuses on the television set in the living room and then pans to the window, as if trying to decide where to look. Another amateur camera shows us the Union Square from above, from the terrace. This same camera recoded the following images, shot a few blocks further, in which we see tanks.

Night falls and in the streets the crowd sings, a cameraman talks, we hear shots followed by booing and whistles. Everything drowns in the darkness of the night and the uncertainty of what is happening. We hear people speaking of tanks, screaming and fire. This is followed by an update emitted by TVR that announces the suicide of the "traitor" general Milea. Morning comes, it is now December 22nd, and the new day is met with the confrontation between demonstrators and *securitate* troops. The army shoots over the head of the *securitate* groups, which in turn flee. The images now turn to the Central Committee headquarters, it has been taken by the people. The female

narrator tells us that the camera that had been recording Ceausescu from the balcony is the "first to go over to the other side, more out of curiosity than resolve."

We see the terrace of the Central Committee, where a helicopter lands and how Nicolai and Elena Ceausescu flee, barely a few metres away from the people that have taken the building. We see different views of the helicopter taking off. Two focal points have been established: the Central Committee headquarters and the national television station.

The scenes that follow show the moment when demonstrators started arriving at the television station and were recorded because two cameramen were able to smuggle a camera out of the repair room. In these images we start to see Romanian flags with the centre cut out. A mysterious man appears inside the television station building, he knows how important television is right at this moment, he says so: "We need the TV!". When trying to speak with the director of the television station he sees the camera and invites it to join them: "Ah! The camera, after you." The camera, however, is not allowed into the meeting. This is an intriguing moment; we are completely blind to what happens in that meeting, which could have been decisive. We just know that we have been left out, that the camera has been left out. Again we witness a moment of censorship that the camera has made visible, the camera has captured its own blind spot. Meanwhile, the people in the streets chant "The truth! The truth!" This ironic juxtaposition of visual censorship and voices claiming for the truth and transparency signals to one of many contradictions that take place and are pointed out in the film.

The following sequence shows a set in the television studio, the state television is going to broadcast a group announcement from its station, and we see how the people that will be communicating this address are preparing for the broadcast. It seems like the media has been quicker than the revolution, as if the people are working hard to catch up. This address is to announce the triumph of the revolution, but it feels too fast, something has been dislocated, the revolution has targeted the official representation machine at the same time it has targeted the political administrative dependencies, something in the order of what we have come to understand as the process of revolution has changed. The inexperience, uncertainty, and doubts of the revolutionaries are quite evident. They decide to have Mircea Dinescu, a poet who had been under house arrest in recent years, addresses the public. The scene is being directed as if it were theatre. These images from the TV station are followed by images of families watching their television sets at home. We move from the enunciators to the receptors of the message.

Afterwards, the film takes us from the interior of a home, in which people watch television, to a camera in a car panning the street with the radio audible in the background. This time we move from spectators to enunciators, however these message-makers are new and inexperienced. The borders between roles in communication become more and more nebulous. We see television trucks making their way through the crowd on the street. These are the professional message-makers and transmitters. Once again the cameras point to the balcony of the central committee building. This time, to record the official resignation of the government announced by the Premier, there are three cameras recording, but the address must be repeated because the television was not ready to broadcast. From the ex-official governmental representative we go to the new man in charge, Iliescu, a counter figure to Ceausescu.

Night falls again, there is an attempt to broadcast, this time it is Iliescu who is trying to address the people from the balcony of the Central Committee, there is a glitch and the broadcast goes back to the studio. When the connection is recovered we see Mazileu speaking to the crowd.

Inside the Central Committee building a group of people are discussing the measures that are to be taken in the following days; they are discussing the language that is to be employed, the image of the flag, which should just include the traditional colours without any other ornament, and the name of the new state, which should now be simply "Romania." Afterwards, we see images from the exterior of the balcony, the scenes are confusing, shouts from the crowd are heard. The people in the balcony are trying to figure out what is happening on the street, they ask the crowd if somebody is shooting, the specifically say: "Tell us what is happening."

The following sequence, once again shows an image within an image. In the larger picture, according to the text on screen, we see Vlad and Guse, the Securitate Chief and the Chief of General Staff, trying to manage the situation. In the smaller frame within the picture we see Nico Ceasescu, the dictator's son, who has been apprehended and is now being shown on television. We simultaneously see orders and actions, behind the scenes and in front of the television studio's camera. The smaller image becomes the only image on screen after a few minutes.

The streets are chaotic, shots are heard, tanks roll by. The Central Committee headquarters is also being shot, from the balcony they ask for a cease-fire, they ask for help knowing that there are cameras from the television station. The film continually

alternates images from the TV station and the Central Committee building, these are the two fronts of the revolt. Both are supposedly under attack.

Afterwards we to back to a set in the television studio, where soldiers walk into a live transmission, they are asked to get out. This sequence is followed by images of high-ranking figures at the Central Committee speaking on the phone. They are trying to make sense of the reports they receive on the phone concerning helicopters that have been hit. They do not even seem to know where these came from. Terrorists are mentioned, the origin of the shootings are not discerned.

A new arrest takes place, the Minister of Interior, Postelnico, and Dinca, are apprehended, it is said that they had been found hiding and, through an announcement of TV Libera, the National Salvation Front informs of this arrest. We see how Postelnico is interrogated, they ask him who gave the orders to shoot, he says he does not know. Nobody seems to know.

We see a new date, December 23rd, followed by a sequence shot by an amateur videographer just outside the television station, there are shots and a tank can be seen. The improvised journalist runs to a car and talks to his friend who drives, "We're war journalists now."

In the following sequence there is a change of location. We still hear shots, they come from the high-rise buildings on Victory Square, which, as the narrator tells us, were ordered to be built by Ceausescu and were never completed. They are empty, the female narrator compares them to a stage setting, the enemy is said to be hiding in them. It makes one think of the theatrical aspect of the revolution itself, the staging of politics, the staging of change of power. The voice-over asks if the shooting is by a portion of *securitate* still loyal to Ceausescu, or if it is by combat units from military intelligence. The images are repeated several times, but this does not make anything any clearer. The narrator says "Belief in the enemy's presence is a habit. Recollected fear during forty years was utilized to maintain power." She speaks of the "internal tactic of deterrence" and the "inertia of fear," shooting had started the day before but, as she argues, "people are acting as if war has been going on for a long time."

On a television set, we see a man with bloodstains on his face, he is accused of shooting. He says he is just an officer on observation, that he is not armed. However, the people that have captured him say that he was carrying a gun, to which he responds he was just trying to join his unit. Mistrust is running high.

The following scenes show a British journalist trying to report what is happening, covering the snipers "loyal to Ceausescu", or so he believes, which are shooting in the background. He has to repeat his lines three times and quite possibly none of the takes are any good. The shooting is too loud, we see him stop, lean against the wall and resign himself to wait.

The intertitle now tells us it is December 24th. The first images of this new day are those of corpses in the back of a truck. A soldier tells us he is transporting the "victims of the terrorists," "the last victims of the ex-Governor who deprived us of freedom." These "last victims" come from the airport, which is now said to be peaceful; the last terrorists were forced into the forest. Some suppose these terrorists are Lebanese and Syrian parachuters. The crowd surrounding the vehicle, which is driving away, kneels down, many of the people there bare their heads and chant "Freedom Freedom!" like a mantra. There is a jump, and the same crowd now chants "Ceausescu, tyrant!", "Kill the tyrant!", "Ceausescu won't live to see the New Year!" Afterwards we see the word "Identifizierung" on screen, followed by two prisoners with their hands on their head coming closer to where the camera is. They are pushed around, slapped and belittled. They claim to be innocent; the people that have arrested them say their documents are forged. They are treated roughly. Their treatment seems even rougher compared to the images that follow, which show a group of people in the television studio singing, crying, making an very emotional appeal on that night, Christmas Eve.

On Christmas day, December 25th 1989, cameras gathered at a weekly news studio. The streets are disserted. Everybody is waiting for the images of a single camera, which still has access to what is happening. The narrator tells us "Since its invention film has seemed destined to make history visible. It has been able to portray the past and to stage the present. We have seen Napoleon on horseback and Lenin on the train. Film was possible because there was history. Almost imperceptibly like moving forward on a moebius strip the side was flipped we look on and have to think if film is possible then history too is possible."

It is on this day that Nicolai and Elena Ceausescu's trial takes place. The charges they are accused of are: genocide, subversion of the state powers by armed violence against the people, destruction of public property, subversion of the national economy, attempting to flee the country to gain access to more than 1000 million dollars. They are sentenced to death and the sentence carried out, the television announces that the evening programme will carry pictures of this. We read on the screen "Die letzte

kamera" (The last camera). According to the broadcast the Ceausescus have been detained by citizens and soldiers, they have been medically examined and considered to be in good health. The images show them being medically examined. We see people gathered watching the images. Both are sentenced to death, we see them while they are supposedly hearing their verdict, Nicolai does a dismissive kind of gesture. We see these images on a TV screen, and journalists watching this screen in disbelief. It is only a few moments later that the screen in the image becomes the image we see on our own screen. We are informed that the sentence was carried out by firing squad. Again we see a TV screen, on it appear the two corpses, those of Nicolai and Elena Ceausescu. We also see a series of spectators. While we see a close up of Ceausescu's corpse we can hear laughter and clapping. Afterwards we see a close up of Elena. Then we see them both.

The images of the bodies are followed by a role of credits that includes all the people behind the cameras, that is, all the people that shot the footage used in the film. In this manner they are declared not only makers of the images, but also actors and characters of the film.

There is one last personal address before the final credits and immediately after the credits we have just seen. It is of a man in a factory. He speaks of the situation he and his people have endured, of hostile feelings among them, of living with scarce means. He reminds us that people have died, that there have been victims, and he expresses his hopes for a better future. After this emotional appeal we see the final credits, the "proper" end credits of the film, those who were behind its production and the institutions that offered their support.

4.2.2. HOW THE FILM GOT STARTED

Farocki's first approximation to the events that took place in December of 1989 in Romania was that of a spectator, and just like any spectator, eagerly watching television in those days and looking for information in the media, he received the confusing, shocking and, in some cases, untrue reports that were transmitted. It was these events that made Baudrillard come to the conclusion that there had not been a

revolution, or if there had been one it had been a fake television revolution.[838] But what moved Farocki to make a film was not the images he saw, but a book, in his own words: "In the case of VIDEOGRAMME (1992), I proceeded from an imagined situation. I read the book by Von Amelunxen and Ujica about the revolution in Romania and thought of a film in which a few people sit in front of monitors, observe, and analyse sequences of images – just as one might discuss this kind of sequences at the editing table during a seminar. The film turned out very differently."[839]

His initial idea was for a film "in which a handful of people who understand something about politics and images would analyze in detail a series of images from those December days in 1989. To make the film like a seminar."[840] He visited the book's editors and, according to Farocki, Andrei Ujica suggested making the film together, and that is what they did. They travelled to Bucharest during the summer of 1991.[841] Ujica tells the story slightly differently but with a similar outcome: "Harun Farocki contacted me through the publishing house, expressing his interest in making a film adaptation of the dialogues and asking me if I wanted to help him. It told him it would be so much more interesting to make a film about what is not dealt with in the book, namely the videograms of that revolution. We decided to do it together."[842] Farocki recounts: "So we drove to Bucharest to collect material addressing the question whether the cameras had 'reproduced' images of the revolution or 'produced' them – (in Vilém Flusser's terms, whether the imagination was 'old' or 'new'). We had envisioned a discussion, but soon came to realize that the material required a filmic narrative. A narrative which by its fractured nature included the discussion."[843]

In Bucharest, the directors were able to use a room in the Ministry of Culture as an office, and they began researching the images that had been made in the days of the revolution. According to Farocki, it was not difficult to gain an overview of the material. Nearly everybody who had been filming in those days knew each other and, a year before their arrival, television producers from Britain, the US and France had catalogued the footage. What proved to be harder was to get hold of the best-quality

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[838] Farocki,"Written Trailers", p. 228.
[839] Hüser, Rembert. "Nine Minutes in the Yard: A Conversation with Harun Farocki." In *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, edited by Thomas Elsaesser, 297-314. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004, p. 311.
[840] Farocki, "Written Trailers", p. 228.
[841] *Ibid.*
[842] White, RObp. 68.
[843] Farocki, Harun. "Substandard." In *Nachdruck / Imprint: Texte / Writings*, 248-67. New York and Berlin: Lukas & Sternberg and Verlag Vorwerk, 2001, p. 260.

material. The Television had many hours of material broadcast by Studio 4 at the time, but this material had not been taped by the station itself. In some cases they had copies viewers had made with VHS recorders. Farocki recounts, "After we had again and again seen images showing tens or even hundreds of thousands of people coming together in order to achieve the overthrow of the old regime it seemed absurd to call this a television revolution."[844] They dismissed the original idea of a filmed analysis and decided to reconstruct the five days of a revolution, from December 21st to December 25th 1989, as comprehensively as possible. Editing started in summer 1991 in Berlin; the first challenge was to figure out the day and time the scenes had been filmed. Strict chronological order was of upmost importance for the directors. Then a second trip to Bucharest took place in autumn 1991 for more material. According to Farocki the research took five weeks in total, the outline of the film and the offline-montage took around nine months, the post-production three months.

When *Videograms of a Revolution* had its premiere in two cinemas in Berlin in 1993 there were only two people in the audience – in both cinemas.[845]

4.3. REVISITING / RE-EDITING THE REVOLUTION

4.3.1. INTRODUCTION: ROMANIA 1989

There seems to be no consensus on the origins of the revolution, in fact, according to many authors it remains unclear if it was a revolution or a coup.[846] However, there is a consensus that Ceausescu's fall from power and his fall from television were in a way simultaneous. The latter did not represent the former; they were enmeshed to the point that it is near impossible to say where one begins and the other ends. There is a total and undisguisable tear in the fabric of Ceausescu's power, which includes both his ability to command and the apparatus that represents and legitimizes him. His faltering speech, the loss of control over the transmission in the public square and on television is the dictator's breaking point. The recurrence to

[844] Farocki, "Written Trailers", p. 228.
[845] Farocki, "Written Trailers", p. 229.
[846] Levesque, Jacques. *The Enigma of 1989. The Ussr and the Liberation of Eastern Europe*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1997, p. 191.

censorship, to panning out and cutting the transmission was the *coup de grâce*. In Young's words: "The closed circuit of power that would connect Ceauçescu to his audience in an unmediated fashion has been interrupted and the transparent representation of the nation in his figure has been replaced with an opaque obstacle."[847]

It is worth mentioning a series of determining factors leading up to the events of December 1989, even though the people behind the actions, the contradictory information spread by different sources, and the motives for Ceausescu's speedy trial and execution are still murky. It is important to point out that Romania in the 1980s was one of, if not the most, internally oppressive of all Warsaw Pact countries. Defiance to the regime was especially difficult and dangerous.[848] Even the USSR was taking steps towards reformation. Romanians heard of the Russian reforms, as well as the events taking place in other Eastern European countries through different foreign media outlets: Bulgarian television and radio could be seen and heard in southern Romania, Hungarian and Yugoslav media reached the northern and western parts of Romania, and Radio Free Europe was also within reach.[849] In late 1989 the economical and political situation in Romania had severely deteriorated, while other communist regimes had relinquished power, as was the case of East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.[850]

The personal politics of Ceausescu isolated him from the public, as well as the party and the military.[851] He had become an increasingly despotic, nepotistic and personalistic ruler. Next to him, the most important political figures in the country were his wife, Elena, and his son, Nicu.[852] Ceausescu had become prisoner to his own cult, and he was doomed by his own inability to recognize the importance of the events of 1989; he and his clique had lost touch with reality to the point where they could not grasp the magnitude of the social crisis in Romania.[853] Maybe it was because of this that Romania, among the Warsaw Pact Countries, was the only country where communism ended with serious bloodshed.

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[847] Young, Benjamin. "On Media and Democratic Politics: Videograms of a Revolution." In *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, edited by Thomas Elsaesser, 245-60. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004, p. 256.
[848] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 543.
[849] Chirot, Daniel. "What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?". In *The Revolutions of 1989*, edited by Vladimir Tismaneanu, 19-49. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 33.
[850] Roper, Steven D. *Romania, the Unfinished Revolution*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2005, p. 57.
[851] *Ibid*.
[852] Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 542-543.
[853] Roper, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

The spark of the uprising seems to have been the eviction of a highly respected protestant pastor, Laszlo Tokes, member of the Hungarian minority in Romania. He resisted the order to leave his home and parish in Timisoara on December 15th 1989, and thousands of people surrounded his house to prevent his eviction. This concentration turned into a huge anti-Ceausescu demonstration, which continued for two days. The social crisis erupted on December 17th, when it was violently put down and the news of the bloodshed would become known to the Romanians from foreign radios.[854] In the international news the nascent revolt was first propelled onto television by images of corpses reputed to be victims of the army's attack on the protestors at Timisoara, where "The bodies were laid out for display to the television cameras and the images of the dead helped publicized the incident abroad."[855]

To make matters worse, Ceausescu, on a television broadcast on December 20th, praised the army and security police and called for a massive demonstration to bolster support in Bucharest the following day, which turned into an anti-Ceausescu demonstration.[856] During this demonstration the party and state security officials were shepherding the crowd into the square under the balcony of the Central Committee building as usual, however, something completely out of the ordinary was about to happen. While Ceausescu addressed the crowd, cheers turned into boos and the approved chants of "Ceausescu and the people" changed to "Ceausescu the Dictator." In Vladimir Tismaneanu's words, power had "slipped form the balcony of the Central Committee building to the street."[857] In the film we see the shift of power starting with the camera panning from the balcony to the streets "more out of curiosity than resolve," as the film narrator states. From that moment on, hundreds of thousands of people took part in anti-Ceausescu demonstrations. This was to be Ceausescu's last rally; it was this speech that the directors of *Videograms of a Revolution* analyse with clinical detail.

On December 22nd the mass upheaval in Bucharest, and other major cities, led to Ceausescu's flight. The *securitate* fired on demonstrators, the army changed sides, the television station was seized, and an interim government was formed by a self-appointed body, the National Salvation Front (NSF), which was led by Iliescu.[858] However, the members of the NSF, according to Tismaneanu, were exponents of the

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[854] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 543; Roper, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[855] Young, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
[856] Brown, *op. cit.,* p. 543; Roper, *op. cit.,* p. 59.
[857] Brown, *op. cit.,* p. 544.
[858] Levesque, *op. cit.,* p. 197.

second echelon of party and government bureaucracies, and they "did their upmost to contain the rise of civic and political movements and parties committed to fulfilling the initial revolutionary expectation."[859] Others, such as Brown defend the NSF was more varied in its constitution, arguing it was made up of "some democrats" as well as some leading communists.[860]

It seemed that what was going on was a civil war. Supposedly, on one side we find "the people" and the new government and, on the other cold-blooded, fanatical terrorists, emerging out of the *securitate*. Radio Budapest mentioned the presence of Syrian and Libyan mercenaries fighting with terrorists, but who were these terrorists? The media talked of 63,000 casualties, later it was revealed that the figure was closer to 600.[861] Within all this confusion only one thing seems to be clear, and that is Ceausescu's total lack of knowledge when it came to what the Romanians desired, the position other politicians, both from within and outside of his party, were taking, and the seriousness of these manifestations. As Chirot states, there could hardly be a better demonstration of how removed Ceausescu had become from reality than the way in which he was overthrown, illustrated by the shock on his face and the ineptitude of his attempt to escape.[862] It was not long before Ceausescu was caught, accused of genocide, and executed on Christmas day 1989.[863] The hasty trial and execution, based on accusations that turned out to be false raise so many questions that lead many to question if this was a revolution or a coup. Several of the news stories circulating at the time turned out to be false, such as the reports of the corpses in Timisoara, which were later claimed to have been taken form the city morgue and hospitals. Who organized this staging? The *securitate* was blamed for the massacre at Timisoara, however, according to Levesque it was later learned that it was the army who opened fire. Also many question the role played by the NSF and the new members of government. Levesque mentions General Stanculescu, who commanded the army, faked a broken leg in order to be taken to the hospital and, hence, be unaccountable for the ordering of fire. Levesque also states it was this general who put the Ceausescus on the helicopter, and it was he who ordered the trial. In 1990, he would be appointed as Defense Minister.[864] Some authors hold the thesis that the Soviet Union played a key role, basing their

[859] Tismaneanu, Vladimir ed. *The Revolutions of 1989*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 10.
[860] Brown, *op. cit.,* p. 544.
[861] Levesque, *op. cit.* p. 197.
[862] Chirot, *op. cit.,* p. 46.
[863] Brown, *op. cit.,* p. 544.
[864] Levesque, *op. cit.,* pp. 195-196.

assumption on the links between the leaders emerged in 1989 and the USSR, and stating that the KGB coordinated various acts. According to them, it was the KGB who spread most of the information that later turned out to be false, such as the mass grave at Timisoara. Another puzzling issue was that the so-called terrorist attacks had somehow avoided the new government's strategic points. The buildings surrounding the Central Committee headquarters were riddled with bullet holes, however the headquarters building was not, and it was from its balcony that the new leaders made their appearances. Something similar happened in the main television station, which makes some people wonder if the "terrorists" could have been a diversionist exercise to keep the crowds away until the new government could get itself in order.[865]

The belief that Ceausescu's demise was result of a coup is supported, basically, by two arguments: first, because the Romanian post-revolutionary leadership consisted mostly of former communists and, second, because it is argued that revolutions usually have a period of rapid change followed by incremental consolidation, which is not the case in Romania, since the political and social policy remained relatively unchanged until 1996.[866] According to Tismaeanu, who writes of the events in Eastern Europe in 1989, "unlike traditional revolutions they did not originate in a doctrinarist vision of the perfect society and rejected the role of any self-appointed vanguard in directing the activities of the masses."[867] It makes him ask himself "Were they truly revolutions in the classical sense and, if so, what new ideas and practices did they propose?"[868] Others, such as Verdery and Klingman, defend that some form of popular uprising was necessary to end the regime. Juliana Geran Pilon sustains that it was both a revolution and a coup, or more precisely, that a coup succeeded in hijacking the revolution.[869]

One of the things that Ujica and Von Amelunxen discussed in their book was why the situation in Romania was perceived as exceptional among the other collapses of Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. For them, unlike the other revolutions which had allowed for an imagery that remained within the realm of the symbolic, Romania provided the "full classical revolutionary scenario." This scenario included "a country oppressed by a despotic tyrant; protests; violent suppression; riots verging on civil war; then victory and the dictator's flight, arrest, trial, and execution –

[865] Levesque, *op. cit.,* pp. 195-198.
[866] Roper, *op. cit.,* pp. 59-60.
[867] Tismaneanu, *op. cit.,* p. 1.
[868] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[869] Roper, p. 60.

all in the course of five days and recorded on innumerable video cameras, with a live broadcast of the revolutionary victory by the one TV station that had until then been reserved for the political representation of the regime. To observers in Romania and abroad, this was not only the "real" revolution in Europe, but it came in real time: "History had become literally (a)live."[870] According to Kernbauer, the events reaching the rest of the world "live," or supposedly live, seemed often hazardous, irrational, and violent, their outcome far from predictable. She argues that the spectacle of the Romanian revolution appeared "not as less than history but as its excess attesting to the contingency and opacity of events. Instead of a smooth transition to democracy and capitalism, Romania offered a glimpse of fissures in social texture in many Eastern European countries – a sight that within the greater scheme of Westernization often remained unacknowledged."[871]

4.3.2. CONFRONTING THE IMAGES ANEW, 1992

The film was researched and edited in 1991-1992, so the images from Romania were no longer breaking news. There were old, since nothing grows old like recorded world events. The early 1990s saw a lot of debate on the revolution in Romania and how it had been "spectacularized," it was part of a larger debate on the effects of television and broadcasting on wars, catastrophes and other dramatic historical events. Many questions remained unanswered. Farocki and Ujica continued the inquiry via the images that were recorded during the uprising; seeing them again, against one another, and writing with them in true essayistic manner.

One of the first things that becomes apparent is how moving images follow hierarchies, which depend on the amount of sources covering an event, the quality of the footage and, above all its "liveness" or "actuality." Another thing that might be obvious, but should not be overlooked, is how the film offers a migration of frame, which deeply affects both the content and the shape of what is being produced. What we have before us in *Videograms of a Revolution* is a reflection, and not a communication, on the way the Romanian Revolution was seen through the screen. The shape this reflection takes is that of an essay, it is fragmentary, complex and many issues are left

[870] Kernbauer, *op. cit.,* p. 73.
[871] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

unresolved. It raises many questions both on the images it shows and the way they were shot, distributed or concealed. What we have is a reflection on television as a legitimation tool, how it ceases to be so for Ceausescu and switches to the other side, as it were. It begs questions such as: does television cover or make history? Does history in turn shape television? Where does television place the spectator? Can the spectator intervene and how? Who informs whom? What happens between recording and transmission? What happens between transmission and retransmission?

According to Young, if television has the function of moving images through space in a potentially endless transmission, video recording performs a temporal function that holds back, delays, captures, and stores the image in its decomposed form; and the portable video camera also extends and diffuses this recording function beyond the television studio.[872] But what we encounter with *Videograms of a Revolution* is a further delay and a transmission of images to a new medium; they go from multiple broadcasts and amateur recordings to a film. Three years have passed since the images were recorded, and during those years the geopolitical landscape had continued to change, for one, the USSR had been dissolved. By 1992 these images were old news, television waste, leftovers. To begin with, much of the material included was itself not of great value to the broadcasts of the time. The contrast between these "out-takes" and the broadcasts of the time is one of the most interesting features of Farocki and Ujica's film. The directors, by showing what had been cut out of the broadcasts, let the viewer peek in on the means of image production.[873] In what follows I have singled out some of these videograms to see them in detail.

4.3.3. SCENES OF ADDRESS

The first sequences I would like to single out are three direct addresses to camera. Two of these addresses are in what we could call the fringes of the film, one is at the very beginning and the other at the very end of the film, and the third address I shall refer to is Ceausescu's last public speech. The latter is quite different to the other two, maybe even opposite, but they have in common the conscious address to a public. They are all in a sense "performative," but in very different ways. Following Austin's

[872] Young, *op. cit.,* p. 251.
[873] *Ibid.*, p. 252.

idea of how some things get done by simply saying[874] and Butler's notion of how acts, everyday acts, construct identities,[875] we can come to see the wounded woman's words at the beginning of the film as a constitutive act, a rupturing act; whereas Ceausescu's speech is an act of reaffirmation, it is an act that has been repeated time and again. It is his way of reinforcing his power, his image; it is a way of steering things "back to normal," after what he must of deemed a minor incident. Ceausescu's speech makes perfect sense with the way he uses his public addresses and public appearances on television. There has been resistance to one of his orders, the resistance has been repressed, and he praises the handling of the situation and calls for a rally to showcase his strength. Only this time things do not go according to plan.

These two types of speech acts differ in a very important way. Ceausescu's speech is almost a ritualized act, much like the innumerable speeches he has given before. It is an affirmation of his power, it is an act of maintenance. His speech is completely unremarkable, except for the fact that it is interrupted and would be his last public address. His performative action is one that he has been doing for so long his power seems, at least to him, beyond a doubt. However, the wounded woman at the very beginning of the film is performing, if not her identity, her stance, her political position, her place in what is happening. She is putting something in motion.

4.3.3.1. The Wounded Woman: Rodica Marcau

The first sequence we see, even before the title of the film and only preceded by the words "A Farocki Production Berlin," is quite unsettling. We do not know what we are being drawn to. We see a young woman who has been wounded and is now being treated in a hospital. This sequence is at the very margins of the film, and at the margins of the five days that are portrayed in the film, it was filmed before the revolt in Bucharest, filmed outside the capital, and it is shown before the films title. We are introduced to the film by way of this wounded body, its cries and all the noisiness of the hospital. This sequence, on the one hand and in a way, is out of the films narrative, and, on the other, it throws us into something already in motion. We do not know what is going on, something has happened and we seem to have missed it. My interest is

[874] Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Second ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
[875] Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

immediately peaked. I am, so to speak, placed in the middle of something in motion. In fact the meaning of the word "interest", which comes from *interesse*, means precisely that: "to be situated between." To interest someone in something means to act in such a way that this thing can concern the person, intervene in his or her life, and eventually transform it.[876] As a spectator I am now expectant and waiting for my questions to be answered, or at least to learn more.

There is an intentional approaching to history as an event, as an uncertainty, not with the historian's hindsight (although a certain amount of this is inevitable), not relying on it to build a logical sequence to confirm what is known. The narrative recounts the process of asking, of not knowing, of not being sure, of essaying. We see a woman who was at Timisoara, who was witness, and who speaks from her wounded body and gazes, not back, but gazes into something far away. She is the object and subject of the image, she is what we are looking at and trying to follow, she is who the camera focuses on, and she is who directs us, who speaks. It is she who introduces us to the film. Or it might be more precise to say, that it is the directors who introduce us to her, and her sequence is the first contact we have with the film that is about to play. We do not just see her; we see the camera seeing her, recording her. We see what we see from the point of view of the camera (and cameramen behind it), which in turn records her recounting of what she saw and felt, her pain and her hopes.

This beginning can be understood as a replication of the emergence of an event, in a way this sequence serves as an *analogon* of the disconcerting reports that came out of Timisoara. It is a recourse that Farocki has used before. In his film *The Inextinguishable Fire* (1969), Farocki thinks of a way to speak of the effects of napalm, without using photographs of victims and without using the images that were so commonly circulating at the time. By filming how he burns his own skin with a cigarette and stating simple facts such as the temperature at which napalm burns, he invites a reflection on the consequences of the use of the deadly substance in warfare. This sequence in the hospital functions in a similar fashion, by echoing the uncertainty of suddenly realizing that something has happened or is happening, that feeling of walking into a space where something unforeseeable is taking place. Something has happened, a rupture in the habitual daily order, we hear disconcerting news and do not know exactly what is going to happen. What ignited the international interest

[876] Lomax, Yve. *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005, p. 65.

concerning the events taking place in Romania in late 1989 were the bodies found in Timisoara, the dead silent bodies that shocked the world and infuriated the Romanians, even if it was later learned that not all of them were victims of the supressed revolt. The spark that starts the film is another body from Timisoara, this time it is one that can speak for herself and does. She is who ignites our questions; she places us within something already in motion by addressing the camera and getting our attention.

It is a television camera crew that brings us face to face, as it were, with this woman named Rodica Marcau, who upon seeing a camera and the possibility to address someone, even if she is not sure to whom exactly she is speaking, feels she must relay a message. She makes sure image and sound are being recorded; she is concerned with her "message."[877] She feels the need to communicate, we could say in Judith Butler's terms that she is interpellated, which according to Butler is the very reason that we start to give an account, only because we are interpellated, one is asked what one has done or has seen, or one is in a situation in which one tries to explain to another who is waiting to know. This woman from Timisoara is giving an account of herself, which is not the same thing as telling a story about herself. Giving an account of oneself takes a narrative form, which not only depends upon the ability to relay a set of sequential events but also draws upon a narrative voice and authority, being directed toward an audience with the aim of persuasion.[878] This woman has been addressed to speak and she in turn addresses us, an unknown spectator that her recorded message will reach. Or more precisely, we are addressed by Farocki and Ujica's film, as they were by this recording.

The importance of this choice, of the selection of this sequence for the beginning of the film cannot be stressed enough. Before we know what we are seeing, we hear her cries of pain, a few moments later we listen to her testimony and claims. The directors offer a body, a wounded body from the crowd, which in a regular television broadcast would probably have been spoken over, if not ignored. They give this body the chance to speak for herself. By placing her first and in the forefront, the common "verbal privilege" of news broadcasts is subverted. In the previous chapter, it was argued that the system of information does not operate through an excess of images, or at least not only, but by selecting those who are entitled to decipher the flow of information about

[877] Kreimeier, Klaus. "Enlargement of the Field of View. About *Videograms of a Revolution*." In *Harun Farocki against What? Against Whom?*, edited by Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun, 179-85. London: Koenig Books and Raven Row, 2009, p. 181.
[878] Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

anonymous multitudes, to speak for them. Farocki and Ujica, by letting the voice of this young wounded woman state her name and tell her story, are overturning the dominant logic that makes the visual the lot of multitudes and the verbal the privilege of a few. Here we have a voice from the multitude speaking for herself, a voice that is no longer anonymous because she has made her full name known. The film begins not only with images shot at the time, but with a voice from the crowd recorded at the time. The narrator's voice will be second to hers.

This is but one voice from the crowd, who acknowledges the camera and takes the opportunity to speak. In a certain sense, she is "performing," not pretending or lying, but giving shape to her claims, to her experience, to the violence she has witnessed and felt on her own body, she is waiting to have bullets removed. As Kreimeier argues, "Her cadence reveals that she knows her statement is 'recited'," an for that very reason this scene would most likely be considered a staged scene in a tradition documentary;[879] however, this is not the case with Farocki and Ujica's film. The directors do not forget, and do not let us forget, that the human being is a mediated being, "it's the television camera that enables the performance, and the performer appears only because the camera is present."[880]

This woman, Rodica Marcau, in her direct address to the camera, describes how she and many others were attacked by the secret police, and continues the protestors' demands for a free Romania. In Young's words, "The double injection to remember the fallen and to continue the revolt, nominally addressed to her fellow revolutionaries, has been rerouted to the viewers of the videotape. The addressee is undetermined, the receiver put into question, and the viewer's response remains equally unfixed. The electronic circuit of the woman's declaration posits both revolutionary and spectator at the place of the viewing subject."[881] When I see her, and hear her, I think of Lévinas, of his words, "The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question."[882] There is a fear for this Other, a responsibility that, according to Lévinas, "goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before

[879] Kreimeier, *op. cit.,* p. 181.
[880] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[881] Young, *op. cit.,* p. 248.
[882] Lévinas, Emmanuel. "Ethics as First Philosophy." In *The Lévinas Reader*, edited by Seán Hand, 75-87. Oxford and Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 83.

being devoted to myself (…) as if I had to answer for the other's death even before *being*."[883] It is a responsibility for the other person, for the stranger or the sojourner, to which nothing in the rigorously ontological order binds me. This summon to responsibility destroys the formulas of generality by which knowledge or acquaintance of the other re-presents him to me as my follow man. The fact that we first encounter a person, a singular face is important. It is so much harder to have an emotional, personal, response to a crowd. However, when we see just one face and hear her story, it is hard not to feel for her. As spectators we are addressed, addressed to act or at the very least to "know." There is an imagined recipient. First, it was whoever was listening via the recorded images, then, Farocki and Ujica during their research, and afterwards it went well beyond them. In a certain sense what we have is a reproduction of their encounter with the footage, a videogram, one of many that offers a point of entry to an event that has no clear origin and no way of being explained in its totality.

4.3.3.2. Ceausescu's Last Address

This address comes from the voice of the ruler, the expected voice, only something totally unexpected happens. Just as the sequence with wounded woman in Timisoara, it is shaped by an unexpected occurrence. Whereas the wounded woman starts her address when she becomes aware of something quite extraordinary for her, i.e. a camera is filming her; Ceausescu's communication via camera is a habit, almost second nature. However, the dictator is forced to stop his speech and the camera automatically changes its focus, it stops shooting him. The woman felt obliged to speak when she saw the camera, and now the camera is forced to move away when Ceausescu is interrupted. There is an inversion in the film; one voice from the crowd takes preference, precedence, over *the* leading voice, the voice that has authority to decide, to command and to tell what the story is about. The sequence of Ceausescu's last address is the sequence of the loss of his voice, of his power.

We see Ceausescu on the balcony, he begins by sending "revolutionary wishes" to those present and to the inhabitants of the city of Bucharest. We see images of the crowd with their signs and official photographs of a young Ceausescu. So far it could

[883] *Ibid.*

be any of the mass rallies he had held for years. The narrator tells us that television transmits live; on the screen we read "For the last time live," and this announcement denotes something irreversible, an "irreversible time" if you will, which is a crucial and complex moment. Lomax argues, "Irreversible time is what makes me and unmakes me, and this no-going-back time is not but one time; it is, at the very least, a two-time dance. It is the advance where combinations come together, hold together."[884] In this case, Ceausescu's last live speech starts out as a common broadcast; it is a speech like so many other speeches, a rally like so many rallies before. It is business as usual until it is not. After the film's intertile, we see Ceausescu proceed by thanking the organizers of the demonstration but, at a given moment, the sound coming from the crowd changes, Ceausescu looks for something while his speech starts to falter. He cannot find the origin of the disturbance, its reason, he cannot understand it, and this exemplifies his disconnection with reality, with his people, with his party. His self-involvement is made visible in this very moment. He is totally lost, and he does not even know it. He is too preoccupied with speaking and being heard to be listening, until he is forced into silence. Someone runs behind him, there is a technical disturbance in the image. Ceausescu lifts his hand, someone comes up and says "they are entering the building," the screen is now a blank red rectangle, but sound can still be heard. The camera that had been broadcasting live continues to record in the broadcasting van, Farocki and Ujica show us what was not broadcast at the time, we see the camera panning to the sky, which was what it was ordered to do in case anything unexpected happened. What we are seeing is a desperate attempt to hold onto power, the regime trying to censor its own loss of control. When Ceausescu returned to screen "the repetition of his image also involved an alteration in its significance" it became "the image of a weakened, insufferable tyrant, its broadcast energizing the popular revolt in Bucharest."[885] For Kreimeier, here, with this interruption something quite interesting is starting, what he calls "the enlargement of the field of view." What we are witnessing is a "fracture within the machine, which – under the conditions of the dictatorship – decides on the visible and the invisible."[886] When television comes back on the air it does so without audio, but we, as spectators of the film, do hear the corresponding sound.

[884] Lomax,*op. cit.,* p. 35.
[885] Young, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
[886] Kreimeier, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

The directors decide to go back over these scenes. The narrator goes over what has happened, starting with the beginning of the disturbance: "Something rivets his (Ceausescu's) gaze. Shouts surge up. His speech stops. The camera wobbles, a technical disturbance. The broadcast is interrupted. What has occurred?" Parvulescu eloquently refers to this sequence as "the wobble of history."[887] A camera from the weekly newsreel recorded some images of streams of people leaving the square, as well as streams of people directed to the balcony, where things seem to be in order. There is no indication of the nature of the disturbance. What has provoked this exactly? That is hard to answer. One can give many reasons that would rationally construct an argument, but what exactly was it that made this happen is ever elusive. We know what happens later, but what it is that is going on during the recording of these images, we are not entirely sure. The film will not clarify this either. The film will not impose an answer; it will continue to ask questions regarding the images that cover the event. In a sense, the images are the event, they look for answers in those images because that is what they have, that is what they can see and scrutinize time and again.

What these images make clear is that there has been a rupture, and rupture is precisely how Badiou defines the event, as that which is constituted by a rupturing with the order which supports it.[888] For one thing, there has been an interruption not only of the broadcast, but also of whom is to be covered by this broadcast, of its protagonist, which has shifted from the dictator to the masses. When Ceausescu's image, his broadcast image, starts to crack this is the very beginning of the end for him. In Jacques Attali's terms "the monopolization of the broadcast of messages, the control of noise, and the institutionalization of the silence of others assure the durability of power."[889] And it is precisely this that is crumbling, this is what Farocki and Ujica show us, something has happened and the first shaking of the landscape was broadcasted, it was the broadcast itself. Once this had happened there was no going back.

The ruler, the one who usually speaks and is listened to, and whose declarations and shadowing figure in the media silences any other, has now been silenced. Silenced by the crowd during his address and silenced in the film by the directors who put before him a single voice from the crowd, the wounded woman from Timisoara. One could

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[887] Parvulescu, Constantin. "Embodied Histories. Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's *Videograms of a Revolution* and Ovidiu Bose Pastina's *Timisoara-December 1989* and the Uses of the Independent Camera." *Rethinking History* 17, no. 3 (2013): 352-82, p. 362.
[888] Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. London: Continuum, 2007.
[889] Attali, Jacques. "Noise and Politics." In *Audioculture. Readings in Modern Music*, edited by Cristoph Cox and Daniel Warner, 7-9. New York and London: Continuum, 200, p. 8.

infer that one of the film's themes is about who has the power to speak, who has the command to be listened to. It is about the struggle of a group of people in their search and fight for self expression, which implies Ceausescu's fall from power and from the representational order, and how power and its representation are so intimately intertwined that it is near impossible to see where one begins and the other ends. The dictator has been forced in to the position of the spectator, as it were, and he is forced to try to see, to try to hear, what has happened. This time power censors itself, the camera looks away to not broadcast Ceausescu's confusion, and when he is on screen again he does not appear the same. Something has changed and his voice is no longer the leading one. Domestic cameras, amateur cameras, are now going to complement the state equipment, not only has the commanding voice changed, the gaze has multiplied, and like in a broken mirror, the fragments have started to reflect a series of similar but complementary scenes, a polyphony of voices and views of the state's breakdown as well as the breakdown of what Kreimeier terms "the state's media apparatus."[890]

This first part of the film, which includes these two addresses perform the conquest of what Rancière called verbal privilege. It is achieved in two different, and complementary ways, first, by placing the voice of the wounded woman before the voice of the narrator, and, second, by placing this voice from the crowd before the voice of the dictator who, unlike her, is unable to finish his address, which further illustrates his loss of verbal privilege. He is definitely forced into silence, the crowd no longer listens to him, it answers back.

4.3.3.3. The Man in the Last Sequence

After a very long role of credits where we can see all the different people that recorded the material, both the amateur footage shot with domestic cameras and the broadcasted images recorded with professional cameras, the image of a small group of people appears. Among them is a man, who just as the woman at the very beginning of the film, feels the urge to express himself. He is a worker speaking in a factory district, who starts with the words "I just wanted to add…" and shares his criticism of the dictator and the way common people were pitted against each other while Ceausescu

[890] Kreimeier, *op. cit.*, p. 181-182.

and his family got rich. He says of Zoë Ceausescu (the daughter of Nicolai and Elena Ceausescu) that she had ninety-seven thousand dollars in her account while he and people like him could never enjoy themselves – the lights went out at six o'clock.[891] He comments how they were led to hate minorities when they had been able to live together in the past. At this point his voice breaks and he cannot help crying. He mentions that children have died, that many people have lost relatives, a loss which he asks to not be forgotten, he wishes for everybody to support each other and in turn the people that surround him clap.

By placing this man and what he has to say between the credits, he is placed in a sort of limbo, neither in nor out of the film. He is not placed together with the videograms of the revolution, since we have already seen the credits of those who shot those videograms. But this sequence is also a videogram, right after his appearance we see the "final credits", those that mention Farocki and Ujica, their crew and the institutions that supported their production. The directors are adding one last thing, as is the intention of the man when he speaks, what they are adding is a strong sense of loss, of emotion. Even if there was a staging of victims, even if the figures of the deceased were grossly exaggerated, there were real losses and real victims, which should not be obscured by the false reports. This broken voice from a face of the crowd is a reminder of that. The film ends as it begun, with an emotional address, with hope, with voices speaking for themselves, from emotionally and physically wounded bodies. These human faces dealing with their traumas, surrounded by others, are a far cry from the studio anchor and from the disembodied narrating voice. These are the "revolutionaries," these are the people that dared to protest and demonstrate and address the camera with their hopes and their feelings.

Both this last address and the initial one by Rodica Marcau, can be seen as a prologue and an epilogue. However, their similarities make me think that they fulfil the function of a *parergon*, in the sense that they are separated from what we could call the "main text" or the "larger work," but they do have an effect on the body they frame. Etymologically *parergon* is linked to the Greek words *para*, which means additional, and *ergon*, which means work.[892] It is most commonly applied to the visual arts,

[891] Farocki's exact words when describing this sequence are: "The worker in the last scene of the film says of Zoë Ceausescu (…) that she had ninety-seven thousand dollars in her account while he and people like him could never enjoy themselves – the lights went out at six o'clock. He says this in a factory and not in a business district". Farocki, "Substandard", p. 250.
[892] Oxford Dictionaries.

specifically of the17th century. It is a visual recourse of self-referentiality, a frame that speaks of framing, of self awareness, it is a way of a making a work present itself, it is an interlocutor of sorts between the "world" and the representation. It is more than just around the work, it can put in place the instances of the frame, the title, the signature, the legend, etc. It is related to the internal order of what it holds; it works its commerce, its evaluations, its surplus-values, its speculation and its hierarchies. Derrida sees the *parergon* as neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, "it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work."[893] It does not let itself be framed, but it does not stand outside the frame. "It is situated. It situates between the visible edging and the phantom in the center, from which we *fascinate*."[894]

In *Videograms of a Revolution* these two sequences correspond with two different voices, specific voices probably not heard at the time of the revolution and voices that would be quite strange to find in a documentary. They are not "official voices," they are not the voices of politicians, dissidents or admired poets, they are not even aspiring journalists. They are their bodies, their stories, and their emotions. In a sense they are small figures, indiscernible in the larger picture, if it were not for the directors' choice to single them out. They are not part of the general narrative, but these two people, this man and woman, are from the very story they frame, from very deep within the story. They are two heads from the anonymous crowds that have been singled out. They are two regular Romanian citizens, two of the many people with stories within the story of the revolution. Not only can they be seen as a *parergon*, but also as a close-up of a detail taken deep from within the frame.

4.3.4. A LONG SHOT: HABIT AND EVENT

The first sequence after the film's title is a very long shot filmed from a window, in it two thirds of the picture is taken up by residential buildings and a flat block, and nothing much seems to be happening. We see some movement in the background but nothing seems remarkable. As the narrator states, the image is unequally divided, "the event has been shifted to the background." However, is it not from the very background

[893] Derrida, Jacques. *The Truth in Painting*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 9.
[894] *Ibid*., p. 12.

that events emerge? The background is constant and it is from and against this continuity that difference, rupture, noise can arise. It is against the everyday background that events happen. What is unusual here is the flow of people, the crowd moving in the distance. Where are they going? What is happening? This moment of uncertainty, this movement of people and of focus, this openness is exactly what defines the notion of the event according to Badiou. An event is something that is up for grabs, that can only be thought in anticipation or in hindsight. The cameraman here felt that this little bit of chaos, of noise, this turbulence, could become something. This moment of possibility is a sort of intermediary state between disorder and order, a state of birth, a time of generating newness, a death. The event has something that remains "up in the air." The event is made of elements that affect each other and enter into composition and make something happen between them, which belonged to neither. An event is the act or process of something "in the making" or "coming undone."[895] It is an encounter in the middle of a crossroad. The event is something that might alert us, raise hope for the unforeseeable to happen, unconnected to that which is already assembled that will catch us off-guard and that we will have to negotiate.

The only way to intuit the possibility of an event is in relation to what is usual, to habit, of wondering if the scene one is seeing is part of the ordinary? It is only possible to distinguish that something out of the ordinary might be about to happen through habit; only because of habit does one distinguish what is new, unheard of, unseen, unfamiliar.[896] This image captured by an amateur cameraman would have been so easy to deem unremarkable, as Farocki argues "So trivial a picture is endurable only for a man who lives in the place and is accustomed to look out of the window to reassure himself of his specific existence. One should thank the cameraman for having persevered with this view, a vision which hits the target precisely because it misses."[897] The man behind the camera is thinking this event, in one of the only two possible positions one can think the event, he is thinking it in anticipation. Whereas the men at the editing table, Farocki and Ujica, are thinking it from the other position: in retrospection. We as spectators are somewhere in between times in a certain sense, where exactly depends on the previous knowledge we might have of Romania's recent history. So if the cameraman thinks this event in anticipation and the directors of

[895] Lomax, *op. cit.,* p. 22.
[896] Flusser, Vilém. "Habit: The True Aesthetic Criterion." In *Writings*, edited by Andreas Ströhl, 51-57. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 200, pp. 51-57.
[897] Farocki, "Substandard", p. 252.

Videograms of a Revolution think it in retrospection, it becomes quite clear that an event is a conceptual construct, which can only be thought by anticipating its abstract form and can only be revealed in the retroaction of an interventional practice that is thought through.[898] For the person behind the camera, something is slightly different, something might happen, what that might be is still open, uncertain, it might not amount to much and be lost, it might go back to the background, or never leave it completely. The cameraman has gambled, he has taken a risk. This person has anticipated, at least the possibility, of this abstract form. There is uncertainty as to what that image will lead up to, at least for the cameraman. As Farocki argues, "Were the demonstrations to be supressed and the Ceausescu regime to emerge victorious, it would be difficult to hold on to the memory of the uprising. With this picture, the man behind the camera proves that he did not just look away," in fact "his film looks forward to times in which one can show pictures."[899] If the uprising were to fail, this image would have become, in bazinian terms, a trace, an imprint of something that did happen even if it was something that died before fulfilment. It would be a way of holding on to what Barthes calls the "thing that has been," a thing that has passed and only remains through an image. Barthes is writing about photography, but I find this argument perfectly relatable to video in this case. What Barthes speaks of is the "authenticity" of something that is vanishing or will vanish, the fleeting presence of something.[900] The cameraman has seen people in movement at a distance; this could or could not lead to a big change. Whatever happens, the cameraman has decided to record this event, to ratify what he is seeing, to obtain a certificate of presence of some sort. Barthes makes a distinction between photography and cinema, even though cinema has a photographic referent, the fact that this referent shifts, its constant flow, for Barthes this does not make a claim for in favour of its reality. The essential difference for him is that photography breaks the "constitutive style" that is common to both cinema and the "real world."[901] I have my doubts concerning the importance of this distinction, since the "power of authentification" that Barthes credits photography with, does not necessarily decrease with moving images, it can in fact increase, specifically if we are referring to factual moving images. All this leads me to think that this "power of authentication" in fact lies somewhere else, outside the images themselves, or maybe it lies both in and out of the

[898] Badiou, *Being and Event*
[899] Farocki, "Substandard", pp. 252-254.
[900] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 77-78.
[901] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 89-90.

images, somewhere in the relationship between image, reality, perception, and interpretation. In addition, factual moving images could be deemed "more real" than photography in the sense that a photograph captures a moment, while the moving image delves deeper, or at least lingers longer, into a situation. Photography might move a spectator to add a story, and documental film or non fiction film offers a story, which the spectator shapes in relation to his or her previous knowledge and experience.

Cinema, video, moving images with their emerging sounds have something very important in common with the event: they are processes, or at least processual. A process is a step, one step after another, it is a procession, and when processions are repeated they trod paths, paths are a trace of that which has been done many times and has come to be the expected route, a route one can go back and forth on. On the other hand, processions can have the opposite effect; they can also lead to irreversible time, the "no-going-back time" where trajectories and lives can never be reversed. So with processual time also comes irreversible time, "with this *declination* comes the instability whence bifurcating time may unpredictably fork and open up the chance for a new direction."[902] An event is a new direction, before it is even clear. And the insight into this new direction before it is clear is one of philosophy's functions. In Michel Serres's terms, the philosopher has the function of protecting "to the utmost the possible," it is the philosopher who "keeps watch over unforeseeable and fragile conditions, his position is unstable, mobile, suspended, the philosopher seeks to leave ramifications and bifurcations open, in opposition to the confluences that connect them or close them."[903] Badiou goes even further when he states that philosophy begins in *what takes place* and in what remains in the form of an incalculable *emergence*.[904] The person behind the camera was able to intuit an event in that flow of people. In the sense that he intuited something different with barely any information makes him a philosopher in this instance. He captured this moment of uncertainty, in anticipation of something that might or might not come to full fruition. He had an idea, and the camera was his tool for "writing" this idea down. The philosopher is not a judge, nor a critic, the philosopher is the protector of the possible, the unforeseeable, the not yet.[905] Farocki

[902] Lomax, *op. cit.,* p. 34.
[903] Serres, Michel. *Genesis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998, p. 23.
[904] Badiou, *Being and Event*
[905] Lomax, *op. cit.,* p. 24.

and Ujica further the act of writing philosophy with moving images in general, and with this sequence in particular.

Part of this philosophical work depends on not rushing to a conclusion, and speaking *with* events rather than for them.[906] For Yve Lomax the difference between theorizing "about" and theorizing "with" is that the former is done from a position that is outside what is theorized, it creates a hierarchical landscape, whereas the later is a risk, an acceptance of a risk, since the whole landscape can change.[907] One way to rise to the challenge is to adopt the model of hearing, in the sense that we hear by immersion, we hear with our entire body. Which might be why "(h)earing is better at integrating than analysing."[908] We are immersed in sound just as we are immersed in air and light, we breathe background noise, it is the ground for perception: "it is our perennial sustenance, the element of the software of all our logic."[909] This relates to Ranciére's idea that being a spectator is not a passive mode, but our natural circumstance.

This idea of being surrounded by sound might be better explained by recurring to etymology. In old French *noise* meant both sound and uproar or wrangling. With time the English language adopted the term only using the former meaning, which was lost in French, where the meaning that remained was that of uproar. *Noise* was also related to nausea and the nautical. "The background noise never ceases; it is limitless, continuous, unending, unchanging. It has itself no background, no contradictory."[910] The association of noise with the nautical is not a casual one. The sea with its ever-moving ever-sounding waves offers a background, which can easily slip by unheard, fused with the everyday sounds. But the sea can unexpectedly grow wild or it can stay calm but never silent. It is an immense open horizon in which one can drown or through which one can travel, and cross to new land. If we use the sea as a metaphor for habit, one of the first parallelisms could be that only those who know the sea, know how to read it. Here the importance of habit is capital. If an event is a disruption, it is essential to be able to single out that which is disruptive, out of the ordinary. To be able to live the event from within, to intuit and think of it in anticipation, to be able to guess, to gamble, that something is coming from the roaring sea of routine and familiarity one

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[906] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[907] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[908] Serres, , *Genesis*, p. 7.
[909] Serres, *Genesis* p. 7.
[910] Serres, *Genesis* pp. 12-13, cit.p. 13.

has to know what belongs to the habitual and what does not. Noise is only an opening, we cannot predict what will be born from it, we cannot know what is in it.[911] The challenge is to think of it in all its possibilities, of not clipping its multiplicity, of letting go while sharpening our senses, for there is no stopping sound. Sound like the event is ever elusive, its shape is only ever conceptual, both before and after its occurrence. In this case, this crowd moving in the distance filmed by a domestic camera that captures it as background. This event shifts from the background of the image to the forefront of our attention, from the window of the cameraman to the screen. From Farocki and Ujica's research to their finished film, to my screen to many yet to come.

The fact that this person, this amateur camera operator, singled out this disturbance in his everyday life, this event in the background, is no minor feat. Background and crowd are not foreign to each other. For Lomax, to listen to the background is to listen to the turbulence of the world. Background noise is mixed-up multiplicity on the move. History is born from noise, noise of the crowd, noise of the naked collective fury of the *turba*, for as Serres points out, *turba* is the origin of turbulence.[912] And this background noise made by the crowd is the first object of history. Before anything else, before language, before even the word, the noise is there.[913] "The background noise is permanent, it is the ground of the world, the backdrop of the universe, the background of being, maybe."[914]

4.3.5. SCENES OF ARTICULATION: MONTAGE AND POLITICS

> "At the editing table babble is turned into rhetoric." Harun Farocki[915]

Within the film some sequences show how what is to be broadcast is staged. We could describe these sequences, in Steyerl's terms, as scenes "in which the conditions of their own articulation are addressed."[916] One very clear example of how the construction of what was to be broadcast is made evident can be seen in the sequence

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[911] Serres, *Genesis* p. 22.
[912] Lomax, *op. cit.,* p. 18.
[913] Serres, *Genesis* p. 54.
[914] *Ibid.,* p. 62.
[915] Farocki, Harun. "What an Editing Room Is." In *Nachdruck / Imprint: Texte / Writings*, 78-85. New York and Berlin: Lukas & Sternberg and Verlag Vorwerk, 2001, p. 82.
[916] Steyerl, Hito. "The Articulation of Protest." In *The Wretched of the Screen*. E-Flux Journal, 77-91. Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2012p. 79.

showing a British journalist, who had to voice his commentary three times in order for it to be useful. There are several scenes that shall be seen in detail further down, but before elaborating on them it might be helpful to introduce some theoretical notions regarding_"actuality" and modes of apprehending events through television. Derrida speaks of two traits that distinguish what makes actuality in general: *artifactuality* and *actuvirtuality*. The first trait refers to the fact that actuality is *made*. It is not a given, but "actively produced, sifted, invested, performatively interpreted by numerous apparatuses which are *factitious* or *artificial*, hierarchizing and selective."[917] Events that reach us through television are created through this "actuality effect," which may be accompanied by advances in the area of "live" communication or in so called "real time." However, "live" and "real time" are never pure.[918] "Live" is never an absolute "live," but only live effect, an allegation of "live." Whatever the apparent immediacy of a broadcast, it always negotiates with choices, with framing, with selecting. The image is not an integral reproduction of what it is thought to reproduce.[919]

For Mary Ann Doane, television's conceptualization of the event is dependant upon a particular organization, which produces three modes of apprehending the event: information, crisis, and catastrophe. Information is composed of a steady stream of daily "newsworthy" events. The content of information is ever-changing, but information is always there. Crisis is a condensation of temporality, it names an event of some duration which is startling and demands resolution, decisions must be made, there is a necessity of human agency. And, the third, catastrophe is the most critical of crises. Its timing is that of the instantaneous, the moment, the punctual. Of course, as Doane asserts these categories are only tenuously separable in practice.[920]

Both Derrida's analysis of the construction and transmission of actuality and Doane's television modes of apprehending events are reflections that deal with the fact that media events are constructed, which is not to say that they are false, but that there is a translation of sorts, a migration between what happens and how it is transmitted. The event itself happens, what remains of it are traces, which are put together. However, this is more complex than a two-step process, the moment of the event and the moment of

[917] Derrida, Jacques. "Right of Inspection." In *Echographies of Television*, edited by Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, 31-40. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2007, p. 3.
[918] Derrida, Jacques. "Artifactualities." In *Echographies of Television*, edited by Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, 1-27. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2007, p. 5.
[919] Derrida, "Right of Inspection", p. 40.
[920] Doane, Mary Ann. "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe." In *Logics of Television. Essays in Cultural Criticism*, edited by Patricia Mellencamp, 222-39. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 222-223.

its transmission are increasingly hard to separate, they work together. *Videograms of a Revolution* shows this entanglement, these workings between things happening and the will to record them, transmit them, watch them and go out to record again, to shoot what is being transmitted, as can be seen in the sequences where cameras focus on television sets and their spectators, because the transmission and the reception are also an event. Traces are produced as things happen, as those recordings are shown other things happen. It is an interlocking chain.

Farocki and Ujica do not offer answers to the mysteries behind the fall of Ceausescu, that is not the point of the film. They raise even more questions, which become increasingly complex. There are a series of questions that seem to permeate the entire movie: where does it all start? Are the events motivating the images? Are the images motivating the events? Are the images the event? The images are what they have and it is what they work with. It is in them that they look for answers and it is with them that they ask questions. These images, which were already old when they worked with them, were put to new light, they were seen anew, they were seen against each other, interrogating, contradicting, or supplementing each other. They were intertwined in essayistic fashion, creating an eloquent case on the apparatus they belong to. They signal to an erosion of traditionally opposing categories such as actor-agent and spectator, action and reportage, professional and amateur, official imagery and irrelevant footage, urgent and old, actuality and archive, document and rubble. All of which are essential concerns of this thesis.

For now, I would like to focus my attention on the notion of actuality, and how it is problematized in the film. Derrida contends that a responsible response to the urgency of actuality calls for dissent, for the dissonance and discord of untimeliness, the disadjustment of anachrony. He argues, "One must at one and the same time defer, distance oneself, hang back, *and* rush into things headlong. One must respond in such a way that one comes as close as possible to what comes to pass through actuality."[921] Initially, this might seem counterintuitive; actuality is related to the now, the right now, to "this very moment." Actuality summons the ideas of breaking news, of present time, of pressing issues. On the other hand, dissent, dissonance and discord need elaboration, reflection, argumentation, at least if one wants to go beyond mere antagonism for antagonism's sake. Derrida is claiming this in order to get as close as possible not to

[921] Derrida, "Artifactualities", pp. 9-10.

actuality, but to "what comes to pass through actuality." It is also another way of tapping on to what he has already been defending, that actuality is not so immediate. In fact, it is the contrary, it is mediated, and Derrida is not alone in his assertion that "actuality" comes to us by way of a fashioning.

One moment in the film when this fashioning of actuality becomes clear is in the sequence where we see that the demission of the official government had to be repeated. The first time the Prime Minister voiced the government's resignation was perfectly intelligible and it was witnessed by the crowd, it was even recorded by three different cameras. But this first time, as it turned out, was not good enough because the television crew was not ready to broadcast it. The fact that they repeated it makes us think that if it is not good enough for broadcast it might as well never happened. The fact that the Prime Minister had to repeat his government's resignation twice points to two very interesting features of television's role in the construction of events as they are occurring. On the one hand, television only needs one take, but it has to be the right take; one that seems "realistic" and it has to be intelligible. It is not enough for something to happen and to be caught on film or tape, it has to "conform" to what is desired or expected, it has to "work." Thus, reality in this articulation is an effect that has to be created, processed. On the other, this selection implies the dismissal of footage, which means not every recorded trace of what is happening is useful. These discards might be as accurate and as "true," and coetaneous with the footage that will be disseminated, but they have fallen in the category of waste, of failed attempts. This division of footage is essential to Farocki and Ujica's film, by contrasting the "useful" and used footage with the "out-takes" and amateur takes, they manage to show the complexities behind a historical event and its imagery.

What Farocki and Ujica offer with their film is a migration from urgency to reflection. It is also a technological migration, from television to film, documentary film, which as we have seen in previous discussions is constructed using the same techniques as fiction. Rancière insightfully pointed out how cinema is a combination of the gaze of the artist, a mechanical gaze that records, and chance images.[922] He defends that cinema seems almost designated for the metamorphoses of signifying forms that make it possible to construct memory as the interlacing of uneven temporalities and

[922] Rancière, Jacques. *La Fábula Cinematográfica. Reflexiones Sobre La Ficción En El Cine*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2005, p. 161.

heterogeneous regimes of the image.[923] For him memory itself is a work of *fiction* in the sense that it is created, it implies a construct, a system of represented actions, assembled forms and internally coherent signs.

This fashioning of events, of historical events, goes back even further, to the very pioneering efforts of documentary film. As has been seen at length in the first part of the thesis, the classical definition for documentary, usually credited to Grierson, was the "creative treatment of actuality." In the 1980s and 1990s, that terrain seemed to belong to television, one could argue that now it has expanded to the Internet. But cinema in general, and non fiction films in particular, have not ceased to be a domain where actuality can and has been mediated.

Before elaborating on specific sequences of the film I would like to mention some problems that come to mind. First, above I have stated that moving images that cover world events age fast, a conclusion that comes from the velocity at which certain images disappear from television news. But who decides on this aging pace? We could say that it is an effect of television, but what about our pace? What about our thought pace? And how about events themselves? Events are not isolated or clearly demarcated, they bleed into other events and carry with them strands of previous events. Television might deem an image old, but does it really stop being relevant? Old for television, old for the first place in the news hierarchy, is not the same thing as irrelevant. The kind of films that Farocki and Ujica make, films that are part of the non fiction terrain and the artistic terrain, films that are independent of market dictates not only do not have to accept the same rulings as television and large studio productions, their strength lies in that they think their position within this larger scheme, within the frame of image producing and within the frame of critical thought. They can critically think images, as well as the technological apparatuses, historical circumstances and the public imaginary in which they are inscribed.

Montage is an essential element in this fashioning of media events, their construction, and it is also essential to their critique. It is essential to film language, to the moving image, but it is so much more. Rancière defines montage as "that which constructs a story and a meaning by its self-proclaimed right to combine meanings freely, to re-view images, to arrange them differently, and to diminish or increase their

[923] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

capacity for expression and for generating meaning."[924] But why limit it to images? This constructive and meaning-giving tool is present in more than just moving images; this constructive articulation also pertains to the field of politics. Hito Steyerl, in her essay "The Articulation of Protest", points out how the relationship between art and politics is usually treated within the field of political theory, and art is often treated as an ornament. She wonders what would happen if this relationship were inversed, that is, if we related a form of artistic production such as montage to the field of politics. How is the political field edited? What kinds of political significance could be derived from this form of articulation?[925] It might be helpful to do just that, to view the Romanian Revolution as portrayed in *Videograms of a Revolution* in relation to what Steyerl has termed "the articulation of protest." Her argument is based on the idea that every articulation is a montage of various elements and that protest is articulated on two levels. On one level, we find a language for protest, verbal and visual, and, on another level, the articulation also shapes the structure or organization of protest movements. Thus, we are speaking of two types of concatenations: one of symbols and one of political forces. In other words, the articulation of protest concerns both the organization of its expression and the expression of its organization.[926]

With all this in mind, lets take into account what wee see happening in the television studio and in the offices where the leaders of the NSF were calling the shots. Both in front of and behind the cameras people were positioning themselves, becoming who they were trying to be. In Farocki's words: "With the future political elite in front of the camera and the future television elite behind the camera, we observe the attempt of both these groups to rid themselves of their amateur status."[927]

4.3.5.1. Taking the Television Studio

The Television Studio became a fundamental site for the revolution. Not only was its conquest seen as a victory, it "became an arena for onscreen takeovers, arrests, and decrees. In staging the revolutionary occupation and armed defence of Studio 4, the new TV personalities were not so much reporting on outside events in the street as

[924] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
[925] Steyerl, "The Articulation of Protest", p. 79.
[926] *Ibid*., p. 78.
[927] Farocki, "Substandard", p. 252.

enacting, performatively declaring, a freed Romania."[928] When the revolutionaries took possession of the studio they did not know exactly what to do, the broadcasted declarations are chaotic enough, but the images of how they tried to decide what to emit and how are truly telling of their lack of professionalism and unpreparedness. The language sounds a bit too much as it should, almost as some sort of "generic revolutionary mumble." Their positioning as a group in front of the camera is adequate for a still image, a group photograph or even a painting, in a certain sense it is reminiscent of Dutch paintings of guilds and companies of the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as of French historical paintings of the Revolution and Napoleon of the late 18th and 19th centuries. The idea of trying to show a poet working, the appeal to brotherhood, it is all very Romantic, but the most revealing images are those of the revolutionaries rehearsing.

They are rehearsing the performance of the revolution, of the rebirth of Romania, its symbolical expression. They are unclear and undecided, overwhelmed. But they are sure of one thing: "Television is with us – we have won!" Farocki describes it best: "The archives not only contained Mircea Dinescu's first call for revolution in Studio 4, 'Let us look up silently to God, but before that we call on the entire army,' but also the preceding dress rehearsal. The actor Caramitru wants to stage-manage the poet Dinescu, 'Tell us what you are doing.' In the meanwhile Dinescu has put his book down and picked it up again several times, and in doing so has forgotten that he is supposed to be working – he just starts speaking. In doing this he ruins the transition which is conventional in television thus failing to stick to the code which governs the representation of truth today. This demands that speech be derived from the action – politics from a telephone conversation, philosophy from driving a car (…). The continuity director in Studio 4 said, 'When we go on air twenty-three million people will be watching' –and we did in fact discover some footage to illustrate this thought."[929]

The film belongs to a different order than the television images. The footage has migrated from television to film, from broadcasts and furtive videotapes to film. The temporal dimension of the film is not that of information, crisis or catastrophe, but that of reflection. But if we recur to Doane's classification and apply it to what the film shows us, the event as seen at the time would be somewhere between crisis and

[928] Young, *op. cit.,* pp. 246-247.
[929] Farocki, "Substandard", pp. 262-264.

catastrophe. Its consideration as a crisis could be based on the fact that it is "a decisive period insofar as it is a time when decisions have to be made."[930] And as spectators of the film, we see - at least in part - how these decisions are made. We can call it a crisis in Doane's terms, in the sense that it requires human agency, and part of that is what we see in the sequences in which the NSF are trying to decide when to celebrate elections, what to call the nation and what language to use in their communications.

4.3.5.2. Politics Behind the Scenes (What was not Broadcast)

In the film we also have a chance to see the provisional government, the NSF, at work. It is their time to "rehearse", to try out different names for the new state, to decide upon a flag, a time for elections. What we see here is the montage of a new state, the expression of the political organization. Just as the revolutionaries on television, the political organization is coming into being, with its own chains of production. With its telephone calls, its messages, its doubts and contradictions.

Ceausescu's loss of power was, at the same time, the loss of power of his image. What ensues is a fight for power and for representation. The people take to the streets, they take the television station and the balcony from which Ceausescu so commonly projected his image. Behind the scenes, of these conquests, a new power is at work, that of the NSF. Essential to their work in this stage is that of the creation of a new image of power, a new image to express a new power. They are creating their own language, inevitably still very much dependant on the previous regime's terminology, but making strides to distance themselves.

Here we see those who are directing the theatre of politics, since just a few people really call the shots. They are trying to control the situation, to figure out who is doing what and what exactly is happening, or so it seems when the camera records them. There are also scenes in which larger groups are assembled and they discus the name that the post-Ceausescu state, the new name of the state, should have; the date for elections, with care to not have them coincide with any other date that might have been significant during the previous government; how the new flag should be, what it should maintain and what it should leave out. They discus at length the language they are to use

[930] Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe", p. 237.

in their communications. This testifies to the fact that the new policies have to be planed, constructed, set up in a particular language, with a specific shape and addressed in a convenient time, this is the theatre of politics. What the directors do by showing us this is its paramount importance in shaping the image of power. These representations do not just happen, decisions are made, choices have been taken, discussions have been held. Symbols are not organic but decided upon. The fact that we see this also signals to the exceptionality of this moment. When do we ever get the chance to see a government in formation? Deciding upon what is to be communicated? This is a usual blind-spot that has in this instance become visible. It is because so much is up in the air still. Not during Ceausescu's period and not after the turmoil of those days would scenes like those be likely to be recorded and much less to remain accessible. The fact that these men are being recorded also begs the question, how "natural" are their reactions, their words? Are they not performing as well? The staging of those who have to step up, to resolve, to "save" what they can, certainly to "save themselves." Seeing these decisions makes us wonder where and how and who decided upon those things that we do not know about the revolt, or coup. It makes their absence even more present. Where is the discussion that decided on the need to hastily celebrate a trial and execution?

These people are "editing" the revolution in Steyerl's sense. Farocki writes, "The work at the editing table converts colloquial speech into written language,"[931] this is precisely what the people calling the shots are doing, they are turning the words on the street into official discourse. They are turning "babble into rhetoric," these reunions are their editing table, at least in front of the cameras.

These images are probably the hardest to "naturalize," they are the least disseminated and least repeated of all the images that make the film. We have seen images of dictators' speeches and rallies many times, as well as images of people taking significant sites that highlight their revolutionary actions, of victims, of proclamations, of civilians crossing streets huddled while bullets shot by snipers whirl by. But we rarely see politics behind the scenes. When have we ever heard how the name of a country is decided upon? At least in 1992 this kind of discussion, with this kind of images (cameras rushed into assemblies, not knowing where to focus, going from one place to another) was quite uncommon. Maybe today the inbuilt cameras of mobile

[931] Farocki, "What an Editing Room Is", p. 82

phones and platforms such as YouTube that have recorded and shown scenes from the so-called Arab Spring and the Occupy movements are changing this. Maybe *Videograms of a Revolution*, like the cameraman shooting the flow of people in the distance, without quite knowing it was pointing at something in the making. In this case, maybe the film intuited the proliferation of cameras and platforms for the viewing of moving images. Cameras have become omnipresent, not just surveillance cameras and digital hand held cameras, but cameras that are not even bought as cameras, which we find as one more element and application integrated into personal electronic devices. Maybe the film unknowingly points at what is now commonplace, that is, amateur footage seen next to professional broadcasts, one frequently uses the other and vice versa, it is almost everyday that we can see a recording from a phone on the news and it is incredibly easy to find television broadcast recorded by phones on multiple streaming platforms. Cameras fit everywhere, we all carry one on us, the only thing needed is the will to record, upload, and press play to see innumerable fragments of events, big and small, public and private, mundane and sensitive; which in turn shakes the basis of these categories. What does "actuality" become when we can all potentially become the cameraperson for the news? We all have the tools to record, the equipment to edit, and an easy access to view all kinds of footage, even if some of it is only temporarily available, that is, until some authority deems it censurable or copyright constrictions require its removal.

4.3.6. THE POOR IMAGE: TRIAL AND PROOF OF DEATH

Ceausescu's fall from grace was also a fall from representation, a fall from the screen. Romania's first betacam was owned by the film department of the Central Committee and was destined to be focused on the Ceausescus, it was to follow them covering their receptions and speeches. When it was time for their trial, the only recordings we have of it come from an amateur camera, a camera produced and sold for domestic use.[932] Ceausescu's authoritative figure is authoritative no more, he is reduced from the Central Committee balcony to a sombre and austere room, from a central position surrounded by pomp to being cornered next to his wife both sitting in shabby

[932] Farocki, "Substandard", p. 248.

chairs, from being recorded by a professional camera to a domestic one. These are quite possibly the poorest images of the film, so poor in fact that Farocki thinks them the worst filmed of the entire revolution and writes of them: "the pictures are not suited to attest the legality of the action"[933] and "blurred and frayed as they are from repeated copying, would be more in keeping with a terrorist action. To use an amateur camera is to debase the defendants."[934]

Hito Steyerl writes a defence of "the poor image," which she relates to the nonconformist circuits, to works by Vertov, international workers' pedagogies, circuits of Third Cinema and Tricontinentalism. She views them as part of the genealogy of carbon-copied pamphlets, cine-train agit-prop films, underground magazines and other nonconformist materials."[935] But in this particular case, what I cannot help but wonder, is why were these images so shabby? Those who decided to celebrate the hasty trial and have the sentence carried out immediately, also decided to have it recorded. The fact that it was so poorly recorded, was it due to urgency or was it intentional? Why just one camera? Farocki states that what is needed is more than one camera, that footage from only one camera gives the impression of having been faked.[936] In any case, what seems of capital importance is the fact that it was considered necessary to record such events, to have proof of them. The fact that they are the only images of that event is what grants them value; in fact, this makes them extremely valuable. Because they are the only proof. Baudrillard argues that they inspire a sense of ireality, in his words, "the videotape is infamous, being only the virtual proof of an actual event."[937]

The fact that these are the only images of the trial imposes a certain tyranny over them. They contrast heavily with the rest of the footage of the film, where we seem to always have more than one viewpoint, even if they are all fragmentary. In some cases low-resolution images, amateur images, are extremely valuable because they are associated with urgency, immediacy and catastrophe.[938] In this case the urgency with which the images were recorded is paralleled to the urgency with which the trial was celebrated. The fact that the trial and execution had to be recorded tells how important it was to have proof, that no matter how hastily they were judged and executed, the need

[933] *Ibid*., p. 254.
[934] *Ibid.*, p. 256.
[935] Steyerl, Hito. "In Defense of the Poor Image." In *The Wretched of the Screen*. E-Flux Journal, 43-44. Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2012, pp. 43-44.
[936] Farocki, "Substandard", p. 256.
[937] Baudrillard, Jean. "The Timisoara Syndrome: The Télécratie and the Revolution." *D: Columbia Documents of Architecture and Theory* 2 (1993): 61-71, p. 64
[938] Steyerl, Hito, "Documentary Uncertainty", *op. cit*.

for a recording of it was not overlooked. What is of capital importance to those who ordered the trial and execution to be recorded was that they were "authentic" images of what happened, that they were evidence.

The images of the trial that we see, in truth do not include any element that tells us it is a trial. We know it is so because we have been told so. The trial was announced in a television broadcast, it was announced in past tense, after it had been celebrated. We see these images through a camera that is focused on a television screen in a room full of people, some of them also hold recording devices such as cameras and sound recorders. We hear the charges the Ceausescus are accused of from the television reporter while the camera pans the room full of spectators. The reporter announces that the evening program will carry images of what has been announced. This very fact, that the announcement of the trial, sentence and execution takes place before any image of those occurrences are shown, highlights how the images of the trial and the corpses will be used to illustrate the event, they are used as proof, as visible evidence.

Within the excerpts of the evening broadcast we hear how Nicolai and Elena Ceausescu were medically examined "as required by law," afterwards a special military tribunal was held. We are shown images of this as well, but we never hear the sound of the recordings of the trial; we do not see a judge, or jury, or lawyers. We see the Ceausescus cornered by old school desks. At one point Ceausescu makes a dismissive gesture, and immediately after we see a room full of people watching the broadcast, the camera opens its field and pans, and we see what they are seeing on the TV set: the "trial". Right after this, the montage goes to the images of the recorded trial, still with no sound. We hear that the sentence was passed and carried out by firing squad. Here the images seem of even worse quality, a fuzzy horizontal band disturbs it.

The following images correspond with the frame of a television set through which we see the corpses of Nicolai and Elena Ceausescu, these images are broadcast silent, but we hear the sound of a room full of spectators, who clap in response to the images. Once the corpses are acknowledged by this group of people, we stop seeing them. We never see the recordings themselves of the corpses; it is always the recording of a camera focusing on the television set. Which reinforces what they are: images, images more than anything else. We arrive to the event of their death as an image from the very start. The film ends with these silent images of dead bodies, grainy old images, made by a domestic camera, but these are the images that persist without any other images to complement or contradict them. The fact that these images were transmitted

without audio, and that we hear no audio from them, gives even more weight to them as images. They are the images of a disappearance, of the end of something. It is the end of Ceausescu's government, but is also the end to the myriad cameras that took to the streets and the amateur filmmakers that went out in search of their own images.

4.3.7. A NEW VOICE AMONG THE OLD IMAGES

The voice of the narrator is the only element of the film that is not recycled. It was recorded and produced *for* the film. The narration is the one thing that has not been appropriated; in fact, it has been delegated, the directors have chosen no to speak themselves. However, the narrator is speaking their words. In the English version of the film the narration is done by a female voice, that of Elisabeth Nieman, whereas in the German version the narrator is Thomas Schultz. In what follows I will be elaborating on the English version and on the effects of having a female narrator.

It might be worth mentioning how documentary narration in general, as Bruzzi argues, has a miserable reputation while still remaining one of the most commonly used devices in non-fiction filmmaking. For her, it corresponds to a false opposition set up by some theoretical discussions "between the 'raw' visual material (which, if it could be left unadulterated, would provide us with a 'truer' representation of the events being recorded) and the forces of subjectivity such as the voice-over that endlessly thwart its objective nobility."[939] This kind of understanding assumes that the image contains truth and that narration interferes with it, that it is a subjective presence that destroys the possibility of objectivity. Bruzzi reminds us how documentary remains a negotiation between film and its subject.[940] As Rascaroli points out, not only is there a wide range of historical and stylistic manners of articulating voice-over in documentaries, one has to take into account what the voice is saying and how it is saying it. Crucially, she points out that the expression of meaning and subjectivity is not the exclusive domain of voice-over.[941]

First, it is important to state that in *Videograms of a Revolution* the film's narration is not a continuous presence. We just hear her at given times, and although she

[939] Bruzzi, *op. cit.,* p. 71.
[940] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[941] Rascaroli, *op. cit.,* p. 49.

gives us information that otherwise we would not be able to know by just watching the film, she at times digresses into philosophical matters that are not exclusive to the images at hand. We could say she is an essaying voice. This feature automatically differentiates her with what is usually understood as the "voice-of-God" narration in documentary film, but it is not the only difference. In documentary tradition, we usually encounter the voice-over of a disembodied and omniscient male narrator. This male, disembodied, omniscient narrator has been the centre of much critique since the 1960s. However, as Bruzzi makes clear, the negative portrayal of voice-over is largely the result of a theoretical orthodoxy that condemns it for being inherently didactic. It is based on an oversimplified perception of "voice-of-God" model, in this view voice-over comes o signify only the didactic style, white, male tones of *The March of Time* (1935-1951) and its derivatives. In this style, the spoken commentary of a narrator-teacher would offer the synthesis of a cycle of events that already reached a conclusion.[942] This is the kind of narrator we have seen in many of the military and educational films recycled in *The Atomic Cafe*. Farocki and Ujica's narrator is different, but even so Farocki had no problem in describing his films as didactic. In fact, he even preferred that term to "essay film" or "documentary", although his term of choice for his film was "theory" or similar expressions in that vain. What is more, Frances Guerin argues that the task of Farocki's films is precisely a didactic one, in the sense that his films are conceived and produced for an audience open to learning how to see and understand images.[943]

What is striking about the criticism towards voice-of God narration is that this monolithic category is used to cover vastly divergent films as if they shared an attitude and ideological aim, it is used as if narration is only a form of preaching and that voice-over is authoritarian by nature, as well as elitist and paternalistic, as Bruzzi insightfully points out.[944] She is not alone in this thought, Laura Rascaroli also defends that not all voices in non-fiction films can be equated, they do not all convey an omniscient and repressive narrator, nor do they all have the same function. She concurs with Bruzzi, to view voice-over as the tool to tell people what to thing is a gross oversimplification.[945]

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[942] Stella Bruzzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.
[943] Guerin, Frances. "Dislocations: Videograms of a Revolution and the Search for Images." In *A Companion to German Cinema*, edited by Terri Ginsberg and Andrea Mensch, 483-506. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, p. 483.
[944] Bruzzi, *op. cit.,* p. 57.
[945] Rascaroli, *op. cit.,* pp. 44-45.

What is more, she argues, "it is hard to believe that spectators lose all their critical powers when listening to a voice-over commentary."[946]

As I have stated in the previous chapter, in the late 1970s and 1980s the use or lack of a narrator was a much-discussed issue. Direct cinema and *cinéma verité* had notoriously rejected the use of what they deemed an "authoritarian" voice-over narration. However, as Youdelman notes, even contemporary productions to *The March of Time*, by now the epitome voice-of-God narration to be avoided, made a different use of voice-over narration. Filmmakers like Leo Hurwitz and Joris Ivens, working in similar years worked with the vast possibilities of narration and can hardly be equated to productions such as *The March of Time* simply by the use of voice-over narration.[947]

Bruzzi sees clear ways of modifying the classically constrained conception of voice-over, of transgressing its rules, such as the insertion of ironic detachment between image and sound, the reflexive treatment of the narration tradition and the subversion of archetypal solid male narrator.[948] All these strategies can be found in *Videograms of a Revolution*. For Bruzzi, an unconventional voice-over has the potential to be a destabilising component of a dialectical structure that intentionally brings cracks and inconsistencies to the surface, and she defends that the use of a woman's voice "is the most recognisably confrontational [alternative means of address], as it challenges, from several angles, the conceptualization of the documentary voice-over as a repressive ideological, patriarchal tool."[949] But the narrator in *Videograms of a Revolution* is quite remarkable for other reasons as well. Her cadence manifests contradictory elements, she seems to be puzzled but at the same time detached. Her cadence seems recited, as did the very first voice we hear in the film, that of young Rodica Marcau. But, unlike her, the narrator's address is not emotional, she seems to be reading, she most likely is. In her reading, there is no emotional interpretation, her performance seems, if you will, mechanistic; if a surveillance camera were to have a voice, I am tempted to think it would sound just like that. She makes me think of Hal from *2001: A Space Odyssey*

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[946] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[947] He specifically mentions Leo Hurwitz's *Strange Victory* (1948) of which he says "The film is held together by a narrative voice that assumes many styles and personas and by an overall structure that (…) gives the film the density of a poem;" and Joris Ivens who, according to Youdelman, "saw narration as a part of an orchestrated totality, whose used voices that were not dull and detached, making documentaries that experimented with rhythmic synchronization between words, images and music.". Youdelman, Jeffrey. "Narration, Invention, & History: A Documentary Dilemma." *Cineaste* 12, no. 2 (1982): 8-15, p. 9.

[948] Bruzzi, *op. cit.,* p. 47.

[949] Bruzzi, *op. cit.,* p. 64. She specifically points out examples of the 1970s and 1980s such as Marker's *Sunless* and John Akomfrah/ The Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Songs* (1985).

(1968, Stanley Kubrick) and of the voices one hears in the tube or train stations, recorded voices that are supposed to offer neutral but useful information. The feeling that she is computing data is what makes her stand out for me. Rascaroli, describes the female narrator of Farocki's *Images of the World* as "the opposite of a reassuring, suturing female voice. Its timbre is calm and rather thin; its rhythm is regular; the voice is melodically flat, monochord, emotionally detached,"[950] which can easily be extrapolated to *Videograms of a Revolution*. The fact that it is a disembodied voice is highlighted even further by the contrast it offers against the two sequences at the margins of the film, Rodica Marcau's address and the man that speaks at the very end of the film. Their defining characteristic is precisely their embodiment, their emotions, their wounds, physical and emotional. In any case, this disembodied narrator cannot be considered omniscient, for she is absent for most of the film. Her presence is strong but not permanent. She does not know it all, nor does she explain from hindsight what is happening. She does not conclude the narration, she is not the last voice to be heard and, more importantly, she does not close the story, for the story remains open. She does not even resolve her own doubts. Farocki and Ujica's film not only offers what can be called an alternative voice-over, this voice-over works in combination with the many voices of the film. It does not overpower them. When others speak, their voices take centre stage.

Ujica, in his following films does not recur to a narrator, so we cannot compare the role this voice plays in *Videograms of a Revolution* to his other productions. Farocki, on the other hand, commonly does recur to voice-over narration. His works in general are likely to be highly self-conscious about their use of voice-over, so much so that Rascaroli dedicates an entire chapter of her monograph on the essay film to his "metacritical voice(over)."[951] Where she, in my opinion, rightfully argues his distinctive self-reflexive use of voice not only is far from resembling voice-of-God commentary, it is a clear suggestion that an unmediated vision of the world is, by now, impossible. For her, the voice-over in films such as *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1988) is one of the key channels of the re-examination of the archival and the ephemeral images that constitute the visuals.[952] The same can be said of *Videograms of*

[950] Rascaroli, *op. cit.,* p. 55.
[951] Rascaroli, Laura. "The Metacritical Voice(over) of the Essay Film: Harun Farocki, Found Footage and the Essayist as Spectator." In *The Personal Camera. Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*, 44-63. London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2009.
[952] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

a Revolution, the voice-over offers a comment from a critical distance. I would like to apply some of her conclusions on Farocki's approach to historical moving images to what both he and Ujica do in this particular film. Rascaroli speaks of Farocki's strategy of debunking his own enunciational authority by the use of a female narrator, which I consider relatable to *Videograms of a Revolutio*. In the film, the directors inscribe themselves in the text not as enunciators or narrators but as spectators. Rascaroli describes Farocki as researcher, spectator, artisan, collector-editor of images,[953] to which I would like to add essayist. The directors first of all manifest themselves as critical spectators, as historians of the moving image, and by maintaining a temporal and critical distance from the images. It is from this distance, or in Baron's terms this disparity, that they are able to write a very complex essay with the images themselves. The only addition to the images, apart obviously from editing them in their own manner, is the voice of the narrator, who in all instances also expresses herself as a viewer of the images.

4.4. UNSTABLE CATEGORIES

Above I have argued that *Videograms of a Revolution* could be understood as an essay that, among other things, signals to the erosion of traditionally opposing categories, such as actor-agent and spectator, action and reportage, professional and amateur, breaking news and old news, event and archive, relic and rubble. In what follows I would like to see some of these issues in detail.

4.4.1. CHANGING ROLES: SPECTATOR-ACTOR-AGENT

There is a first challenge to the traditional conceptions of spectators and director, to the idea that the spectator just watches what the directors present as a film. Farocki and Ujica are, obviously, first spectators of what they saw on the news during the revolt in Romania. They are also spectators of the material gathered and catalogued in the

[953] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Romanian archives in Bucharest. They study and edit the material, and then go for more. But what is surprising in the film is that they maintain and share a sense that we are all spectators. They are sharing a vision, building an essay on a topic, but they do not abandon their spectatorial stance. One does not stop being a spectator of one's film, a reader of one's essay, once the work is done; but in this particular case the position of the spectator seems to be highlighted from many angles.

I have the sensation that something has been shared with me rather than told to me; that I have been asked questions, even if my reply cannot directly interact with those raising the questions. I have the sense of a dialogue being opened, a dialogue that I am prolonging by writing on the film myself, I too see myself as a critical spectator and I too am watching a series of moving images from a temporal distance. I too am a mediated being, engaging with Farocki and Ujica's film and thinking of so much more than just the images from Romania.

Filmmaker Ken Jacobs speaks of the distinction that is commonly made between the audience as a collective and the reader as an individual alone with his text. For him the spectator has a bit of both. Supposedly an audience as a collective usually feels impelled to react promptly, it is the kind of reaction of people who have an interest in the matter. For Benjamin, Jacob argues, in theatre two objects provide this interest: action (which the audience can keep a check on as the basis of its own experience) and performance.[954] Can this way of regarding theatre be of any use to film, specifically non-fiction film? I would like to try to apply it to *Videograms of a Revolution*. The first thought that might come to mind is how can we see these two objects of interest in a film that is made of factual images, since some might contend that there is no performance in this kind of footage. However, the film shows time and again that actions have a performative level, that power (old and new) has its codes to express itself. Performance takes place in action, and action needs performance to be transmitted, even if it is not the performance of the people feature in the recordings. The directors make the material *do* things. In fact, one of the things the film constantly does is signal to codes and kinds of communication, it talks volumes about the apparatus of television and how elements within moving images seem organic but respond to precise planning and expertise. The film is quite illuminating regarding what we expect of

[954] Wees, "Speaking of Found Footage", 147.

different kinds of communications. What immediately tells me I am seeing images out of the ordinary is not only the content and the words, but the positioning of the people in the image and the composition of the frame. For example, when Ceausescu gave speeches from the balcony of the Central Committee, he had enough space to fit comfortably on his own in the television image; those who were with him were at a prudent distance. This is lost when the revolutionaries take over the television, we can see it plainly when the time comes for the Premier to pronounce the government's resignation all the people on the balcony are crammed, there is no space between them, the balcony seems as packed as the streets. The spectators have become the actors, actors who have yet to learn the codes of television. Another clear example of this is the difference between the news anchors at the beginning of the film and of some of the transmissions afterwards. There is one precise scene where we see a news anchor, who has appeared before, in his initial appearance in the beginning of the film he is alone and perfectly framed in his solitude to report the news. But this time he is not alone, there are several people at the desk with him; what is more, a soldier walks right into the set and into the scene. The conventions, the norms behind images that we take so much for granted that we do not realize they respond to elaborated articulations, are made evident by these transgressions.

Rancière also puts into question the opposition between an audience and an individual spectator, but in a different sense. He argues that it is time to examine the idea that the theatre is a community site, as opposed to individuals seated in front of a television, or film spectators in front of a projection. He asks himself what is more communitarian about theatre spectators than a mass of individuals watching the same television show at the same hour. For him the answer it is simply "the presupposition that theatre is in and of itself communitarian." However, Rancière defends, in a theatre, just as in a museum, school or street, "there are only ever individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront or surround them. The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of inter-activity. It is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest."[955] And for him it is

[955] Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, pp. 16-17.

precisely this "shared power of the equality of intelligence" that links individuals and makes them "exchange their intellectual adventures."[956] So these individuals, on the one hand, are readers, and, on the other, this ability is what unites them.

It is interesting that *Videograms of a Revolution* depicts how so many people left their homes and took to the streets with cameras. This was not the initiative of just one individual, it was an impulse shared by many television viewers who slid from in front of their television sets to rooftops, squares and streets, by foot and in cars, and back home again. They move from seeing and wondering to doing and making, still seeing and wondering. We could see this as a move from being passive to being active, but more than two opposed positions, it seems a question of transiting different spectatorships. Agents or actors are not blind to the situation surrounding them, of necessity they are spectators too. For Benjamin Young, the film "investigates the relationship between historical agency and the virtualisation of the event," among other things, it questions the relation between the political actor and the spectator, viewing and acting.[957] I agree with Young when he contends that the film explores the difficulty of a subject that is neither clearly a passive spectator nor an active revolutionary, and it challenges such a dichotomy by both the viewers of the film and those featured in it assume the position of witness, structured by an image that precedes them.[958] This is relatable to Rancière's notion of the "emancipated spectator," whose emancipation begins precisely with the challenging of the opposition between viewing and acting. For him the spectator also acts, she observes, selects, compares, interprets, refashions what she sees in her own way. "Spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem."[959] This is a subversion of assumptions that identify the gaze with passivity and listening with passivity, something that I already mentioned in the chapter on *The Atomic Cafe*. Now I would like to take the opportunity to quote Rancière at length, he writes: "Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed," and it is not a problem of turning a spectator into an actor, "Every spectator is already an actor in her story."[960] Another term for this "emancipated

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[956] *Ibid*, p. 17.
[957] Young, *op. cit.,* p. 248.
[958] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[959] Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 13.
[960] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

spectator" could be Ken Jacobs's notion of "talented viewer." Jacobs is speaking of filmmakers, specifically of found footage filmmakers, which for him means finding the best way to turn *us* into "talented viewers" too."[961] For Rancière, "An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators."[962] When Rancière speaks of translating he is referring to translating signs into other signs and proceeding by comparisons and illustrations in order to communicate intellectual adventures. Translation, in this sense, is the heart of learning, the path from what one knows to what one does not know yet, putting experience into words.[963] One could also say this is a way of "essaying" as I have defined it in the first part of the thesis.

The people I see in the film are spectators, so are the people that chose to pick up a camera and hit the streets to record what they encounter. We are all spectators, individual spectators, but we are also part of different groups. The film has innumerable and continuous references to the camera as dangerous and to cameras being in danger. Not only are we seeing all these through the lenses of different cameras, they are almost constantly spoken of. Cameras usually are "invisible" in the sense that fiction film and many documentary films seem to aim at hiding its trace, the idea is to create the sensation that one is immersed in what he or she is seeing, that one should forget that we are receiving images via a camera. Parvulescu contends that the film points out to its own cinematography, in the way in which the recording device (as participant) relates to the historical event, which makes him speak of an "*embodied camera*." For him, the film offers a dual process of interpellation. It traces the way images both turn revolted bodies into audiences and create revolutionary subjects. The main character in these processes is the camera, in all its varieties. What is interesting to him is that these cameras on the streets as participants last only a few days, that is, until the revolution has "triumphed" and "until a centralized and decorporealized gaze reabsorbs their images into a discourse that no longer serves to spark and maintain spontaneous social dialogue (moments of radical democracy), but to control it."[964]

Romania was behind the times when it came to cameras, the ones pertaining the television studios as well as the non-professional equipment produced and distributed

[961] Wees, "Speaking of Found Footage", p. 58.
[962] Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 22.
[963] *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.
[964] Parvulescu, *op. cit.,* pp. 355-356.

for domestic purposes.[965] But what Farocki asks himself is why were video recorders available at all in a state whose police registered typewriters and kept proofs of the typeface? The answer he gives is that the police were fixated on the written word, "up to that time, no resistance movement had been organized on the basis of video communication."[966] That does not mean that what these people behind the cameras did was without peril. The film's narrator on several occasions mentions how a camera is in danger or how the camera *is* itself dangerous. That long shot from the window where we barely see a crowd moving in the background was recorded by a camera aiming out of a window as if it were a riffle, not knowing more than the shooter who pulls the trigger.[967] Jean Rouch compares the act of taking the camera where it is most effective, of walking with it, to the improvisation of the bullfighter in front of the bull. In both cases, nothing is known in advance, the person behind the camera leading or following the events "is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear;" and this transformation that takes place in the filmmaker is what he calls a "ciné-trance."[968]

If in the very beginning of the film we witnessed the self-censoring mechanism of the state television, what we see in the rest of the film is the proliferation of hand held cameras, which work to further subvert the attempts to control television through centralised transmission.[969] The field of vision is relentlessly in motion. The various cameras enlarge the visibility. Kremeier seems to believe that this is not enough, that they are supposed to do more than just register, they are supposed to interpret it and turn it into political evidence, which exceeds their competence.[970] But is it really their competence? They are still in the midst of something in motion. And, on the other hand, maybe they have, we see the use these images have been put to by Farocki and Ujica and what Kremeier seems to be missing in the original footage is present in what the filmmakers have produced: interpretation and political statement. The people behind the hand held cameras, at least according to the footage used in *Videograms of a Revolution*, are more keen on stating their place, their new freedom, their new status as communicators. This can clearly be seen in the sequence filmed from a moving car,

[965] Farocki, "Substandard", p. 250.
[966] *Ibid.*, p. 252.
[967] Kreimeier, *op. cit.,* p. 183.
[968] Rouch, Jean. "The Camera and Man." In *Ciné-Ethnography*, edited by Steven Feld, 29-46. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, pp. 38-39.
[969] Young, *op. cit.,* p. 253.
[970] Kreimeier, *op. cit.,* p. 183.

where one cameraman enthusiastically says to his friend and driver "we are now journalists," it is they who have turned into something else, who self-proclaim this change. They focus on themselves.

4.4.2. PERMEABLE SCREENS: CAMERAS ON THE STREETS, SCREENS AT HOME, HOMES IN THE FILM

> "In staking out new political ground between the poles of media authority and political authority, the people of Bucharest occupy both their streets and their living rooms in a new way." Benjamin Young[971]

That background noise that was the spark of the event that we miss but intuit reaches us and reached them (the Romanian audience of the time) through the screen, specifically through the television screen. Farocki and Ujica alternate scenes taken from the television broadcast and from camera-people on the streets. We have the advantage of seeing both and something more. The film also includes passages where the person behind the camera films both the TV screen and the streets. Many were both watching and filming, as well as watching and being filmed. The screen seems to have become permeable, porous. The film seems to be going in and out of screens, while I watch it using my own screen.

Television is both part of the background and in the forefront. "Television" itself is a difficult unstable object; it supposedly is a reflection of social life, or at least of a part of social life, and a material element in it.[972] This complexity is present in the film, where the filmmakers create an incessant flow with some of the selected images, resulting in a sort of paralleling mirror effect, a *mise en abyme*. We see a television broadcast, we see it again, we see it through the television in a living room with a family watching, commenting. We see the screen and we see them.

Images come and go, and come again, they are repeated incorporating feedback, creating a reverberating effect, layer after layer. The many homes with their sets tuned in, the many pieces of news, these are part of another and the same background which is

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[971] Young, *op.cit.*, p. 246.
[972] Heath, Stephen. "Representing Television." In *Logics of Television. Essays in Cultural Criticism*, edited by Patricia Mellencamp, 267-302. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 267-302, p. 267.

in motion. The television is there, it is constant, its presence remains, either in the shape of footage from the television station or as an element in the image itself. *Videograms of a Revolution* is made of televisual background: hours and hours of transmitted broadcasts, of amateur recordings, with intense moments that swell and point up. And, now, the film itself has become part of our audiovisual archive, waiting - or maybe just willing - to be singled out.

The television is not only one of the sites of the revolution it is a linking tool that unites living rooms across the nation, where the struggle is lived in a different way.[973] "In a lounge in a modern apartment block, we see a family with four children and a grandmother in front of the television set watching the first revolutionary programs from Studio 4 on December 22, 1989. The father is recording on VHS, and the mother makes comments (…). The cameraman then left the apartment and went to the city center, where he found a space on a loudspeaker van in front of the Central Committee building and recorded the speech made from the balcony."[974] This is but one instance of something we see practically throughout the film: shots of people watching their televisions, turning to one another, commenting in disbelief. Something similar was featured in *The Atomic Cafe*, a tuning in and tuning out of television sets and radios, which where used as transitions between scenes and across the years. In *The Atomic Cafe* it created a sense of continuous expectation. In *Videograms of a Revolution* we also find expectation, but instead of seeing ideal 1950s interiors inhabited by clean-cut nuclear families eating their TV dinners in complacence, we find multigenerational families commenting, answering back with bewildered faces. In *The Atomic Cafe* there is a feeling of need to preserve this domestic bliss, protect it against all odds, all said in merriest of tones; here the viewers are hoping for something to change, waiting to see what will happen, afraid to get too comfortable. Some of the viewers are in fact filming the sets, and then panning to the streets, there is indecision; they are wondering if they should listen to the TV or go out into the streets.

But, why is the television being filmed? Why does the camera shift to the street? What happens between the event and the viewing of it? What happens when one does not know where to look? The television set or the streets? The spectators are perplexed; I too, as a spectator, am perplexed. The event is astonishing but so is its visual articulation, or is its visual articulation the event itself? Mary Ann Doane defines the

[973] Young, *op. cit.* p. 246.
[974] Farocki, "Substandard", pp. 262-264.

temporal dimension of television as that of an insistent "present-ness", a "*This-is-going-on"* in contrast to Barthes notion of photography as "*That-has-been*".[975] It seems as if the person behind these recordings cannot decide what to film, what is going on is happening both through television and on the streets. The people he is recording, his family, in front of the television are astonished with what is happening, they are thinking out loud. What they see on television is so unexpected, it is so impactful that it disrupts the ordinary routine of the broadcasts and of their reception. When this happens Doane says "one stops *watching* television in order to *stare*, transfixed – moments of catastrophe."[976] In a sense the act of picking a camera up and using it to go out and see what one can find and film for oneself has an element of subversion. It stems from wanting to see for oneself, from not being satisfied with what one is told.

4.4.3. ELUSIVENESS OF THE EVENT

There is no doubt that this is as much a media event as it is a historical one. I do not mean to say that it is an event that is being represented by the media, but the media itself is another site, or a site of another order, of the event. The people of Bucharest occupy both their living rooms and the streets, they go from one to the other. The city is filled with citizens that hurry to collectively occupy public space, asserting the previously illegal right to assembly. The street "does not function solely as the space of political action, but plays host to new forms of popular visibility, manifestation and self-representation."[977] The cameras take to the streets, they seem to be everywhere, but this apparent omnipresence is deceptive, "the more varied the material, the more obvious the blind spots it contains. At the beginning, the independent camera people are still in political danger, they act at the periphery of events."[978] They illustrate even further the elusiveness of the "truth".

One thing that never becomes clear is who is the enemy once Ceausescu has fled? Who is responsible for the shooting and the bloodshed during those few days? What does not seem to be put in doubt is that even if the enemy is not clear, there seems to be a need for an enemy. One essential element in war is the creation of an enemy and

[975] Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe", p. 222.
[976] *Ibid*., p. 228.
[977] Young, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
[978] Kreimeier, *op. cit.,* p. 183.

in this creation images play an important role, not only that but, as the narrator of the film tells us, "Belief in the enemy is a habit." Wars depend on both real and imagined projections, according to Zimmermann "State – and corporate – produced documentary is one of the armed forces of war, the artillery that leaves no visible trace as it destroys bodies (…) Distance is mapped through the image, through the process of visualization that annihilates all conflict by compressing it into a spectacle."[979]

I find myself inclined to say we really do not fully understand images, but images are not at fault here, no matter how biased, manipulated, saturated, poor or sophisticated. We simply do not understand what is behind them (which seems to be lost the very moment the record, the freezing of a scene takes place), nor do we understand what is in front of them: ourselves. Or maybe it might be more precise to say that at the very most we are striving to understand ourselves, in a never-ending process, both as part of a collective body and as individuals at the crossroads of external and internal tensions. What are we to do when faced with images, once removed from the event itself and immersed in the experience of seeing-hearing through technological mediation? One option is to essay the answer, to try, to invite uncertainty, contradiction, in a path of thought. To leave aside closed affirmations and open the possibility of discourse, of reflection, of internal motion. Maybe it is not even a *question of* understanding, but a quest with oneself; of oneself in relation to others, in relation to surrounding events, in relation to the acts that can follow by one's own hand. Maybe it is a matter of a quest to keep questions open, of answering without closing, of pointing without securing, of risking and exposing without fear of contradiction, inviting contradiction.

Farocki and Ujica raise questions regarding the use of images for politics, as well as the intersection of television, violence, and democracy.[980] They acknowledge that there is a war in Romania, and there is also a conflict on the level of representation, but the real war and the staged war are barely distinguishable.[981] They confine themselves to footage filmed within the five-day chronology of the revolution, and by doing so they refuse "the confirming perspective granted to the historian by hindsight,

[979] Zimmermann, Patricia Rodden. "Mobile Battlegrounds in the Air." In *States of Emergency. Documentaries, Wars, Democracies*, 51-86. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 52.
[980] Young, *op. cit.* p. 245.
[981] Kreimeier, *op. cit.,* p. 184.

instead returning to history in order to think it as an event, open to uncertainty, change, possibility. This investigation of the tele-visual event works to register the performative force of the revolutionary declaration or what Walter Benjamin called 'messianic time'."[982] And, since it does not show the effects of the revolution, it does not assert, it asks if the decentralisation of media technology is equal to its democratisation.[983]

Kreimeier speaks of an inversion of the relation between politics and media, where "political action only became possible as publicly perceived performance wherever a recording apparatus was present and a media attention guaranteed."[984] And what *Videograms of a Revolution* does is visualize the breakdown of the state's media apparatus, when Ceausescu's last address to the crowd falters, the transmission is not only interrupted it is broken to pieces, leaving film material without sound, sound material without images and sequences of the movements in the crowd.[985] In Kreimeier's words "a sate medium 'changed sides', in a literal and metaphorical sense," which leads him to speak of an "enlargement of field of view" produced by this "fracture within the machine."[986] The consequences of this revolutionary enlargement of the field of view is a co-sovereignty between visibility and invisibility, or more precisely a change in the co-sovereignty between the visible and the invisible. Before, propaganda provided the country with a fixed image as a means to maintain stagnation. For Kreimeier, this has to do with the core of all medialisation, which is verification. "Dictatorship replaces verification with propaganda: wherever propaganda is ineffective, repression immediately comes into play and solves the question of veracity through violence."[987]

4.5. CONCLUSION

Television does not just cover history, television makes history and in turn is made by history too. In fact, Farocki states as one the concerns that moved him to go to Bucharest and make a film on the revolution was if the images had reproduced or

[982] Young, *op. cit.,* p. 253.
[983] *Ibid*.
[984] Kreimeier, Klaus, *op. cit.*, p. 180.
[985] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[986] *Ibid.*, p. 182.
[987] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

produced the revolution. Farocki, describes this concern as being thought in terms of Flusser.[988] For Flusser it was not just images that had this effect, this idea of articulating as well as reproducing goes back to writing.[989] At this point it might be helpful to recur to Baudrillard's essay of "Timisoara Syndrome", in which he argued that this event was a virtual revolution. He defined this syndrome as "The violence of information, as with Timisoara, when it transforms itself with perverse effect, along with the electrocution of the real world."[990] What happened in Timisoara, the staging of the corpses, "the fakery gave rise to an international scandal and destabilized our entire political and information ethics."[991] In Baudrillard's terms scandal has not so much to do with attacks on morality, as attacks on the principle of reality, or the reality principle of the world, of politics, of history. For him it was not the corpses, the violence and the death that made the scandal, but rather that the corpses were forced to function as extras, and he asks if by "the very excess of this 'funeral production' the simulacrum of the 'revolution' itself is revealed," which would make this no longer a problem of the scandal of disinformation, but of *information itself a scandal*. Leading him to conclude that when television claims to present reality as reality, it is in fact presenting fiction as fiction, which would be the field of virtuality. In his words "television abolishes all distinction and leaves no place for anything other than a screenlike perception in which the image refers only to itself."[992]

For Derrida on the other hand, *virtuality*, or more precisely *actuvirtuality,* is one of actuality's traits. His understanding of virtuality is not in opposition to actual reality, "it makes it mark even on the structure of the produced event. It affects both the time and the space of the image, of discourse, of 'information', in short, everything that refers us to this so-called actuality, to the implacable reality of its supposed present. Today, a philosopher who 'thinks his time' must, among other things, be attentive to the implications and consequences of this virtual time".[993] [994]

Baudrillard argues "the Rumanians took themselves hostage by manipulating their own revolution on the screen, but they took us hostage as well, we who absorbed

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[988] Farocki, "Substandard", p. 260.
[989] Flusser, Vilém. "The Future of Writing." In *Writings*, edited by Andreas Ströhl, 63-69. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
[990] Baudrillard, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
[991] *Ibid*.
[992] *Ibid.*, p. 62.
[993] Derrida, "Artifactualities", p 6.
[994] Derrida, Jacques and Stiegler, Bernard, ed. *Echographies of Television*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2007, p. 77.

this fiction of a revolution and this fiction of information;" and a little later on he adds: "Everything happens as part of the infernal cycle of credibility. In the obscure consciousness of the actors of History (…) lay the demand for a ″true″ revolution to make the events of the East credible, because they succeeded almost too easily and thus not ″historically enough″. This revolution had to be made credible by a quantity of casualties and by international resonance. The media had to be made credible through popular revolts, strikes, etc. This generates a vicious circle of credibility that drags everything into its course and discourse and discredits both the revolution and the media".[995]

Farocki and Ujica, in a way, put the media back in its place, they treat images as images. They inscribe the footage broadcast on television and gathered by domestic cameras it into a new frame, one that takes it for what it is, a representation, but also a means of articulation of what lived experience is "supposed to be". What this this episode in television history showed us on little screen, the directors took it and suspended it, giving it an afterlife, retaining it a little longer in its fleetiness by reframing it, migrating it, recomposing and unfolding it. They made visible what is usually unperceived, what Derrida called "artifactuality", the fact that actuality is *made*, produced, interpreted by numerous apparatuses.[996] They exceed a binary logic that opposes *effectivity or actuality* and *ideality*. In Derrida's words "The logic of effectivity or actuality seems to be demonstrated by the virtual happenings in the domain of the techno-media and therefore the public or political domain.[997]

As mentioned before, television deals with the potential of the present, more precisely, according to Doane, television organizes itself around the event and this brings us to one of the complexities in the relationship between television and event: "slippage between the notion that television covers important events in order to validate itself as a medium and the idea that because an event is covered by television (…) it is important. This is the significance of the media event, where the referent becomes indissociable from the medium."[998]

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[995] Baudrillard, *op. cit.,* p. 65.
[996] Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, p. 3.
[997] Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 63.
[998] Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe", p. 222.

Farocki and Ujica are in disagreement with Baudrillard. After pouring into hours and hours of footage covering the events of those few days in December 1989 they arrive to the conclusion that something did happen there, that the revolution was not a virtual one. In Farocki's not uncertain words: "After we had again and again seen images showing tens or even hundreds of thousands of people coming together in order to achieve the overthrow of the old regime it seems absurd to call this a television revolution."[999] The fact that the historical event and the media event were so intimately intertwined, as made evident by *Videograms of a Revolution* demonstrated to what extent we are mediated beings. However direct it may seem, our experience is always mediated, first, by our own bodies and, second, through our engagement with other bodies and things.[1000] Among those things we find technological transmissions of events that affect us. These representations of historical events made with mechanical recording and transmitting devices navigate a terrain that is part of our public life and public space and we experience them both in ourselves, our bodies and minds, and together with others. In what Patricia Zimmermann calls "independent documentaries," a category under which *Videograms of a Revolution* could fall, public space plays a crucial role, it is envisioned as volatile and necessary. She claims that "independent documentary as a fulcrum for producing reimagined radical media democracies that animate contentious public spheres."[1001]

In this sense, essential to our experience of the public space is the realisation that these images are not transparent; they are not self-evident, but coded. This makes it essential to be able to read them, to engage critically with them. What I mean by this is not that we should strive to find "the truth" of a historical event, but try to figure out what these image are capable of saying and, maybe more importantly, what they are not. It is important to think what these images can *do*.

For Baudrillard there is a demand for a "true" revolution to make the events credible, according to him "they succeed almost too easily and thus not 'historiogaphically enough'. This revolution had to be made credible by a quantity of casualties and by international resonance," creating a "vicious circle of credibility that drags everything into its course and discourse and discredits the revolution and the

[999] Farocki, Harun, "Written Trailers", p. 228.
[1000] Sobchack, Vivian *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004, p. 4.
[1001] Zimmermman, "States of Emercency", p. xx.

media."[1002] This leads him to write of a "pretended revolution" that "gently performed what we were expecting of them."[1003] Farocki and Ujica delve into these complexities and are unafraid to construct a film that includes them and turns away from any corseted conclusions; maintaining contradictions, mysteries and uncertainties. Relying solely on images shot during those very days of revolt, they analyse, scrutinise, dissect what they can - namely the videographical traces - and in doing so write a magnificent essay with moving images and spoken words regarding the technologies of communication, political montage and the performativity of images. In Young's words: "Left to deal only with the available, incomplete images, documentary is treated as found footage. What emerges is something like a model of historical knowledge premised on the fact and the limit of the camera already being there to structure the event."[1004] History is bound up with how we read it through images, with all that entails.

In Harun Farocki's work we could talk, one the one hand, a mistrust towards images and on the other, a fixation. This interest and mistrust seems to go hand in hand, for it is with images that Farocki writes essays on image technologies and their possible effects. By not negating that which is usually hidden of the production of images, in fact, by focusing on it Farocki and Ujica make a compelling work that deals with the fragmentariness and unabridgeability of historical events and historical depictions. The title "Videograms" seems perfectly suited to the sequences that make up the film. For Alter the tittle of the film includes a deep ambiguity: not only videograms about a revolution, or videograms produced by a revolution, but also vice versa: a revolution produced by videograms."[1005] In French "vidéogramme" refers to any kind of support that allows the registering, conservation and reproduction of an audiovisual programme, and the programme itself.[1006] The term "videogram" etymologically links image and writing, it stresses its visual specificity and the importance of its "textual", discursive, or institutional frame.[1007] It also leads back to "ideogram", the very first appearance of writing.[1008] It is important to remember that ideograms are emanations of reality, not

[1002] Baudrillard, Jean, *op. cit.,* p. 65.
[1003] *Ibid.*, p. 68.
[1004] Young, *op. cit.,* p. 254.
[1005] Alter, "Reunification", p. 153
[1006] Dictionaire de Français Larousse, http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/vidéogramme/81888?q=videogramme#80917
[1007] Young, *op. cit.,* p. 251.
[1008] Serres, Michel. *Hermes. Literature, Science, Philosophy*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982, p. 65.

shapes chosen at random to represent it. They are images and they are scripture. For Flusser, writing's original purpose was to facilitate the deciphering of images. If images were a *mediation* between humans and their world, in these mediations there was an inherent dialectic. These images that meant the world, carried with them the risk of covering it and becoming opaque. According to Flusser, it is against this that writing was invented.[1009] Writing was to carry a message then, which leads to another world we can relate to "videogram": "telegram", a written transmission that covers a distance to inform or alert. A brief and fast communication that bears with it a hint, at least, of urgency. It can be a call for attention, meant to travel swift but with an inevitable lapse of time between sender and receiver. In the title *Videograms of a* Revolution, as Young states, the use of plural is noteworthy, for it relates to the inscription of the image in a historical field, invoking the transmission of images, as in the sending of telegrams.[1010]

But "grams" also makes me think of units, measuring units, that added together accumulate weight, bit by bit, gram by gram, they can add to something large. A kind of image-sound unit, an imprecise amount, plural, but unsure of the total amount or of what it amounts to. But there is an additive process taking place, in the building of the film, in the experience of the viewer (then and now). The material itself was fragmented and questionable, according to Krenbauer that is precisely why "the directors chose to present it within the "official" scenario in an attempt to reconstruct the course of the revolution"[1011].

Farocki and Ujica are creating an illusion, as is the illusion that the revolution itself is encompassible in images, even if the images are revolutionary, in more than one sense. Baudrillard states that even in dramatic situations optical illusions are created, "Nothing has information value if it has not this virtual surplus value, if it isn't metabolized by this hysterical virtuality." Hysterical not in the psychoanalytic sense, but as the compulsion of what is given as real in order to be consumed as unreal. He speaks of the "Tasaday effect", which in the field of anthropology refers to how with the intrusion of the ethnologist what he or she observes is inevitably altered.[1012] But does it make sense to speak of Tasaday effect, as Baudrillard does, when the "intrusion of observation" is not a disturbance to the object of study but the object of study itself? The cameras, the media coverage, are the very subject of the film. One cannot separate

[1009] Flusser, "The Future of Writing", pp. 64-65
[1010] Young, *op. cit.,* p. 251.
[1011] Krenbauer, *op. cit.,* p. 78.
[1012] Buadrillard, *op. cit.,* p. 63.

the revolution and its presentation without missing the point, both of the film and of the events. One did not come after the other.

It might be helpful to stress the difference between the viewers *in* the film and the viewers *of* the film. In first place, the viewers in the film are *both* spectators and active agents, if not revolutionary, they are actors of what is happening. However, those of us that are viewers *of* the film, we are an open and growing group. That does not necessarily turn us into passive spectators, but we cannot slip into action, at least not into the same action as the viewers *in* the film, and this difference is quite substantial. The contrast between our spectatorship and theirs is at the same time something that brings us closer and distances us from them.

One of the most interesting processes in the film is the how many Romanians, who are spectators of what they are seeing on their television sets are moved into action and how some of the prior protagonists of political life of the country are forced into silence, forced to wait. Within all this what is striking is how we get to see the struggle for a new language. The people that are now in front of the cameras have to learn how to express themselves, they are searching for their own voice. In contrast, the people that form the NSF seem to know exactly what they want to say, but have to think thoroughly how they want to communicate it. The common claim among experimental and independent documentary theory of the need for new voices, alternative voices, such as Farocki's and Ujica's, in a sense is mirrored in the film by the revolutionaries.[1013]

The different and fragmentary images from the street, from windows, from student dormitories, from cars, etc. makes me think of Zimmermman's claim that independent documentaries can function as negations, "offering proxemics as the only way to travel between the inside and the outside, between history and memory, between damaged bodies and healing, resistant psyches."[1014] Here we have a juxtaposition of fragments to write history as a continual process of excavation, retrieval, and explanation, with the self-awareness that the recounting of it will never be complete, closed, unquestionable. The images recorded by the amateur camera operators are a way of "talking back" to the images that up until then the Romanian public had been fed. Farocki and Ujica, in their appropriation of these images, offer yet another layer in the

[1013] Renov, "Warring Images", p. 67.
[1014] Zimmermman, "Mobile Battlegrounds", p. 52.

dialogue between images, a rethreading of these images into recent history and also into the history of technologies of vision, recording and broadcasting. We could do as Renov, who relates works that assume an ethical challenge and replace one-way delivery of ideas with contemporary art and philosophical practices that "question models of mastery or absolute certainty, placing greater emphasis on open-endedness, empathy, and receptivity."[1015]

[1015] Renov, "Documentary Disavowals", p. 130.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to consider the recycling of moving images as a means for historical inquiry, and to reflect on how one temporality saw and wrote on another prior temporality through the traces born out of mechanical recording. The idea was to stress the importance of the relations between temporalities, how the tools of legitimation of one order in a given time can serve as the material for critical thought of another, how seeing images anew can serve as a space for scrutiny and reflection, and ultimately open up possibilities of resistance to official or imposed narratives, or of ways of approaching complex historical events without the hindrance of having to offer closed and definitive account.

The appropriation and re-editing of footage can play an important role in thinking historical events. It offers the possibility of cracking open a representation from within, instead of imposing a new view from above. This is not an automatic effect, it is a choice the filmmaker has. To be able to arrive to this cracking open or, in Benjamin's terms, this brushing against the grain, the film has to take the risk of letting the footage remain open to doubts. The stress moves from the event portrayed to the portrayal itself, and what it says about communication and memory, technology and power.

Consequently, this recycling of images also brings attention to the ways in which value is conferred or inferred, how certain images are defended as more "representative" and more worthy in detriment of others that are deemed waste. How both the events depicted and the images that come to represent them are "edited," and this edition is not self-evident or unavoidable. It also underlines how events themselves are not immediately transferable, translatable. Events too are edited, mediated, and only retrievable as a combination of traces, memory and thought.

My ambition was to offer a reflection on how we have come to experience historical events through moving images and to address some recurrent issues on the difficulties of the specific kind of mediation that recycled moving images offer. The idea of seeing again an image that is recognizable, or seeing this recognizable image together with others that were classified as less important, marginal or useless, what we could call in technical terms out-takes. For this I have recurred to films that share

certain characteristics. In first place, they are generally included in what is termed nonfiction filmmaking, although I have leaned more towards the term "documentary." In second place, these films have been built (and conceived) with previous footage, so-called found footage. And in last place, they are essay films, or at least hold essayistic traits. I have found it necessary to dedicate an entire chapter to reflect on these three aspects that have been essential in the selection of the films included in the thesis. In these reflections I have paid special attention to the earliest definitions of "documentary film" and "essay film," as well as to Jaimie Baron's notion of "appropriation film." I have used these categories not for classification purposes, but as prisms through which we might gain more perspective toward these films as critical endeavours and historical representation. They have served as starting points and points of entre to complex issues regarding the potentialities of a reflective cinema.

My intent has not been to offer an exhaustive study of found footage, documentary cinema or the essay film. There already is substantial bibliography on these subjects. Instead I have tried to offer an in depth study of films that work within, and pose interesting questions to, those realms.

Overall I have looked for mechanisms that open images up, that offer platforms for reconsideration, instead of modes of categorization or classification. I have strived to reflect on how one temporality sees another, while seeing them both through my own. There is a transformation in the relations between image construction and historical approximation in the three films I have seen at length. In first place, Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* offered a very pristine image of history, and of an understanding of history, very much of indebted to modernity's self-reliance on legibility and in accordance with notions of photographic ontology and the superiority of unstaged images. The Archives Project's *The Atomic Cafe* offered an exercise in Culture Studies, building an insightful and comical essay on the American government's purposefully misleading propaganda, barely distinguishable from commercial propaganda for consumer products. Its effectiveness in great part rests on how well timed it was, in the sense that much of the material, which was initially "informative", turned out to be hilarious within the space of just three decades. But it is also due to the critical attitude of the filmmakers towards their material and the audacity of replicating multi-channel televisual discourse. Farocki and Ujica's *Videograms of a Revlution* leads us to a new terrain, where the boundaries between professional and

amateurs camera operators, television presenters and politicians become blurred, and the categories of spectator and actor are eroded. The images have become ways of asking questions, of pointing to gaps, fractures. Images come to prove uncertainty in the possibility of complete representation.

The films show a movement from the creation of an image of history, or history as an image construction, to images as a means for historical inquiry. In *Videograms of a Revolution* events and recordings mix in problematic ways, one starts to wonder if the cameras are there to record events or if events occur so the camera can record them. Baudrillard referred to this when he wrote on the scandal of what happened in Timisoara, which for him went beyond the attacks on morality, the violence and the death that made the scandal, but rather that the corpses were forced to function as extras. This no longer was the scandal of disinformation (such as in *The Atomic Café*), but of information itself as a scandal.

The question of how bodies are forced to act in recorded images and in conflict is a very complex and problematic issue. Baudrillard saw it as something symptomatic with how the news was being constructed in the late 1980s and 1990s, his argument was applied to the news coming out of Romania and the First Gulf War.[1016] Badrillard's article takes me to an idea expressed by Alain Badiou a few years later, in his lectures, where he points out one element, among the many unprecedented features of the First World War, that is crucial, "the use of human material without scruples."[1017] Each of the three films I have elaborated on in the thesis hint in one way or another to this "use of human material without scruples". Shub in her film is critical of how those who wanted the war were to use those who fought it, she presented it as a carnage. She herself "uses human material" in the shape of masses to impose a reading of the Revolution as the will of the vast majority. In *The Atomic Cafe*, this use of human material without scruples is also present when we hear Paul Tibbets speak of Hiroshima as a "virgin target" and a "class experiment," or when we see soldiers walking in to the detonation area after the blast of an atomic bomb. In *Videograms of Revolution*, which covers the very event that lead Baudrillard to speak of the scandal of information, where the corpses were forced to function as extras, there is a turning over, people who would usually be dismissed as "extras" and anonymous faces of the crowds are not only seen

[1016] Baudrillard, *op. cit*.
[1017] Badiou, *El siglo*.

close up and *heard*, they frame the entire film. Farocki and Ujica have moved from the impressive views of crowds to the emotional appeal of singular persons.

The use of human material without scruples is a problematic that extends from belligerent politics to the politics of representation. The uses this human material is put to does not end with the conclusion of conflict nor with death itself. It has a problematic relationship with recorded images, specifically with those that are supposed to "inform". It might be helpful to remember Benjamin's issue with the press, which he defined as a form of communication based on information which he criticised, among other things, because it laid claim to prompt verifiability and its prime requirement to appear "understandable in itself." Images are deceivingly difficult, because they appear to be transparent, hence the platitude "an image is worth a million words." So what are we to do when we *see* the news more than we read it? When we see it through the television that is dependent on audience quotas and fidelity to large corporations, or when we see clips on the Internet of all kinds?

One of the ideas present in the thesis is the constant need to turn information, if not into stories, into a different kind of material, one that has been thought through and is presented not as undeniable, but well-argumented, critical, and that can stand to be corrected or discussed. It is in this respect that I hold great esteem for the possibilities of the essay in general, but of the essay film in particular, especially in regards to approaching historical events in a critical and complex manner. Essays offer a platform of inquiry, for doubting and asking questions. Essay films have the capacity to suspend images, take time to (re)consider them, take them out, retain them to think them differently, out of joint if need be, or in Benjamin's terms change the angle of vision.

In the introduction I recurred to many of Badiou's terms for the 20th century, now I would like to offer one of my own, that of the Century of the Screen. The 19th century inventions for the mechanical reproductions of images have shaped how we have come to represent and think historical events in the 20th century. By the mid to late 1990s there had been 100 years of cinema, 50 years of television broadcast, over 30 years of portable cameras and 20 years of home video recorders (VCR).

In the United States it was not until the Spanish-American War of 1898 that movies got beyond the novelty stage. Up until then they were usually seen in amusement parts, World's Fairs, and as part of vaudeville acts or traveling lecture

shows.[1018] The Great War would have a similar effect in Europe and the Civil War in Russia prompted the use of agit-trains to move their revolutionary message, and among their tools cinema was paramount. We could conclude that war made film what it was and, in turn, film shaped the image of war. Television seemed to further this complex relationship. But video would change this dynamic, at least in part.

The moving images of the 20th century are, for the most part, uni-directional, mono-directional. Video would open the possibilities of response. There is a great difference between Shub's film and the case studies of Part II. Shub's film, which covered World War I and the Russian Revolution as well as the years immediately prior, sent out a message that was "final." In the sense that it was thought to be a rounded representation that did not need further explaining or elaboration. She had questioned material that was completely different in intention to build her story, and her story was now the "true concatenation of events." However, *The Atomic Cafe*, while showing that television in the US was the capital tool for the dissemination of the government's propaganda during the Cold War, was a contestation to this use. It announces a set of possibilities that camcorders and VCRs offered. *Videograms of a Revolution* can be seen as hinting towards the beginning of the end of one-direction image transmission. It was becoming possible for common people, professionals and amateurs alike, to "answer back" with images. The possibilities since the late 1990s have been multiplied exponentially with the spread of Internet and digital technologies, but that is another thesis altogether.

Cinema, analogue television and analogue video have inhabited, recorded, shaped and communicated a century, which they do not seem to outlive, at least not for long. Digital formats and digital screens seem to have pushed them out of the picture. It has been the century of the photographic moving image, the moving images of physical referents.

Something that has been constant in the thesis is the importance of the spectator. I argued, following Rancière, that a spectator is not a passive being but an active one, which can engage to varying degrees. Rancière speaks of the "emancipated spectator", Ken Jacobs of the "talented viewer." In these films, I see something that is even more intensified with the development of new technologies for the production, distribution and consumption of moving images, with which amateur film can challenge the way we

[1018] Wasser, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

think about art, filmmaking, communication and journalism. There is a democratization of media, which of course holds its own problems and limitations. One of the interesting outcomes of this new situation is a new figure that of the "prosumer," the producer/consumer. Such figure offers a great potential for the questioning, and maybe even the subversion, of long-established power structures and ideological hierarchies.[1019] However, as these "prosumers" come to join professional journalists in the creation of images and their communication, and as the public comes to rely on them for uncensored images, as defended by Rascaroli et al. a critical approximation to their recordings still is of the essence.[1020]

In a sense we can see an antecedent of this figure of the "prosumer" in Benjamin's idea of author as producer, who both worked on products and on the means of production. He describes this figure as a producer who induces other produces to produce, and puts an improved apparatus at their disposal. It was Benjamin's belief that this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers, or the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators. Benjamin was pointing to the erosion of categories, that Rancière has taken a step further with his idea of the "emancipated spectator." But having access to a camera, recording and uploading does not necessarily turn one into a producer, at least not to what Benjamin called an "author as producer."

In the discussions in the chapters above I have stressed the importance of dissonance, difference and contradictions are crucial in producing moving images that offer critical reflection and inquiry. That is one of the reasons I place such a high value on essayistic discourses.

The examples seen in this thesis have a series of common features, beyond recycling historical footage. In first place, there is a "talking back", a turning over of meaning and an act of turning waste (discarded footage or poor footage) into worth.
Shub's film introduces a certain approximation to the potential of recycling footage, to the polysemy of images, and the plasticity of film. She is "talking over" rather "talking back", but she is creating a historical image by turning the original meaning of images of the Tsarist regime on their head. The films in Part II, create their discourses in

[1019] Rascaroli, Laura and Young, Gwenda, ed. *Amateur Filmmaking. The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 2.
[1020] "Increasingly, prosumers replace professional journalists and the public has come to rely substantially on amateur videomakers and activists for uncensored information from conflict zones." Rascaroli and Young, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

relation to the original meaning of the footage, the "talk with" and "talk back" to the footage they re-edit. In second place, there is an analytical approximation to images, a study and scrutiny of the images. The directors are in this sense embodying Benjamin's historical materialist, who brushes history against the grain. Shub does so to a point, however she is also incurs in the danger warned by Benjamin, that of becoming a tool of dogmatic propaganda. Hers is a story of progress, built as a self-evident and "undeniable" account. The directors of the *The Atomic Cafe* not only brush their material against the grain, they offer such an intense accumulation of materials that without them intervening *on* the footage, without imposing new words, just by combining what they had, it ends up contradicting itself. In *Videograms of a Revolution*, once again it is the material and its combination that points to its own problems. Things do not add up, there is not one clear line of progress, there are several events in motion, and they are all intertwined. The sense that remains is that no matter how many sequences, how many shots, recorded from all kinds of angles, we will never know the whole story

There is in all this a ludic element, an element of play, an act of desacralizing. In a certain sense, historical moving images can be situated somewhere between document and toy. Playing with audiovisual scraps opens the material to new possibilities. Appropriating this material and allowing oneself to "play with it" can be seen as a way of not being bullied into passivity when confronted with moving images. Playing remains open. The directors take it into their own hands to play with the material, to try, to test, in order to think what they have in their hands. Which leads to one of the most interesting paradoxes encountered in the thesis: how these films that recycle moving images as a means for historical inquiry both create a sense of immediacy (or what Baron terms a "transfer of presence"), while at the same time they are significantly mediated by the filmmakers and the filmmakers' circumstances.

The images themselves become the story, they are the story. They are the common referent we have to think the historical events they portray, and to reflect on the very structures that are supposed to inform us. Moving images have become an important part of public space and, consequently, it is essential to be able think them, to have a space to detain them. To be surrounded by images does not makes us better informed, as Susan Buck-Morss puts it, we have become "a media-saturated but still

information-starved public." [1021] Ranciére, eloquently wrote of the deceiving overabundance of images, how what we have are not that many images, but that they are repeated incessantly, and moreover we have even fewer voices that have the authority to speak over the images. The accumulation of images does not result in more information, especially if the images at hand share the same origin and follow the same guidelines. Both *The Atomic Cafe* and *Videograms of a Revolution* illustrate the problems with this assumption in different ways and recur to images that were conceived as ephemeral and come from marginal productions (as does *The Atomic Cafe*) or that were made by amateurs with non-professional equipment (as does *Videograms of a Revolution*). These films offer a strong contrast to *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, which was determined by the limited images at Shub's disposal. In her case what we encounter is the re-articulation of images into an epic history. The original footage is put under scrutiny and questioned, but the final result assumes that there is something "true" in these images that can finally be seen after Shub's intervention. The films seen in Part II do the exact opposite. *The Atomic Cafe* builds a humoristic critique of a particular period, it is more of an ironical history and *Videograms of a Revolution* demonstrates the difficulty to recount an event in its entirety. In both cases there is both an attitude of mistrust towards the images and a faith or hope in their potentiality for critique, of history and its representation as well as the present from which they speak.

If these films are valuable objects that have a lot to say about history and public life, it might not be surprising that they have been entering the museum in different ways. The films themselves have something that is "museal." In the case of Shub we see an operation similar to that of the civic ritual through historical discourse offered by the model of the 19th century museum, what Sobchack termed "sermonization". All these films are taking documents of the past and articulating them in a discourse that is historical, and that has to do with the present of their time of production. However, it is not for this reason that they are entering museums and art galleries. At this point it might be helpful to take a small detour into a much discussed issue of late, the is one common analysis nowadays which relates two crises that seem to be coeval: the crisis of cinema, that is, of a specific mode of projection and consumption of films; and the crisis

[1021] Quoted in Bottici, Chiara. *Imaginal Politics. Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 2.

of the museum, of a "traditional" model of museum, inherited form the enlightenment and inspired by Universal History.[1022] Thus, museums and art galleries have become more inclusive in their approaches to the moving image.

However I am more interested in the common spirit that certain manifestations of the moving image can share with the idea of "museum" as it goes back to the *museion* of Antiquity. It is interesting how certain films, among them the three seen at in detail in the thesis, have been exhibited in museums and art galleries, projected in university seminars and in festivals, and discussed in conferences and symposiums. They are films for thought, if you will, films that are also writing, images that contest images and the apparatuses they pertain to. They are works that inspire thought and debate, that inspire others to produce more cultural products (in varied forms: films, essays, art pieces..) and they conserve in them images, which they include in a historical discourse and address in a critical manner. They offer a space to dwell, to think, to go back to ones own experiences and arrive to ones own thoughts. They are inspiring, they could be seen as muses of a sort, fleety whispers that are made of temporal, processual sounds and images.

In conclusion I would like to stress the importance certain modes of filmmaking, a reflective mode of filmmaking, can have in our experience of history, in our ways of confronting problematic events, problematic issues and the public space in which these events occur and in which we come to know the images that represent them. Moving images themselves can be tools for thought and inquiry, as much as they can be opaque instruments put to various means. There are many ways moving images can fulfil this critical role, the films seen in this thesis offer one possibility, that of recycling existing images, both iconic and "marginal", and weaving them into essays, that is, into a text (made of images and words) that addresses their fissures, gaps, omissions and uncertainty, and by doing so questions hierarchical relations of value among cultural products.

[1022] An entire issue of the Spanish journal *Secuencias* was dedicated to this topic: *ecuencias. Revista de Historia de Cine* IV, no. 32 (Second Semester 2010 2010).

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